

CENGIZ SISMAN



THE BURDEN OF
SILENCE

*Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the
Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*

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To Özlem

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I would like to conclude this section with an anecdote. Several years ago I gave a lecture on the Sabbatean movement at Connecticut College. At the end of the talk, a professor of Jewish Studies approached me in puzzlement and said that he had never thought of Sabbatai and his followers as “normal” human beings. All he had heard previously was that Sabbatai was a counterfeit messiah, a coward, and a manic-depressive, and that of course, his believers were nothing but a gullible multitude. His reaction was one of my motivations to work harder in presenting the personalities, activities, and worldviews of Sabbatai and his followers in a non-judgmental and non-teleological way. This has not been an easy task. Writing in 1937, Gershom Scholem opened his seminal article, “Redemption through Sin,” with the following remark: “No chapter in the history of the Jewish people during the last several hundred years has been as shrouded in mystery as that of the Sabbatean movement.” Sabbatai and his followers were transcendental characters, whose deeds should be appraised beyond the strict boundaries of Judaism, Islam, and modern psychology. Nevertheless, they are “human beings,” albeit rather, like most of us, eccentric ones.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
DIA	Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi
CUP	Committee for Union and Progress
EI ²	Encyclopedia of Islam (Brill)
Judaica	Encyclopedia of Judaica
IA	İslam Ansiklopedisi (Milli Eğitim)
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
İŞSA	İstanbul Şer'iye Sicilleri Arşivi
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
MES	Middle Eastern Studies
REJ	Revue des Études Juives
TTK	Türk Tarih Kurumu
TVY	Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

For direct quotations from Ottoman, I have used the modern Turkish version with certain modifications. Words and terms that commonly appear in international scholarship such as sharia, dhimma, vizier, sheikhulislam, dervish, pasha, and agha, are rendered without diacritical marks. If they are not commonly used words, such as Kapıcıbaşı, Hekimbaşı, and Vekayiname, I prefer the modern Turkish orthography.

Place names are rendered in both their original forms at the first appearance in the text and then in Ottoman usage only, for example, Smyrna/İzmir; Dulgino/Ülgün; Adrianapole/Edirne. For rendering Jewish names and places, I prefer the system of the *Encyclopedia of Judaica*, with slight modifications. In bibliography, I mostly used the Harvard University Library Catalogue for the non-English book titles.

The transliteration of the name Sabbatai Sevi (שַׁבְתֵּי צִבְיָה) constitutes a particular issue. Throughout the centuries, Sevi's name was transliterated in tens of different ways, such as Zevi, Zebhi, Zwi, and Tzvi. Since my dissertation aims to present the Ottoman perspective of the story in the largest sense of the term, I choose to use "Sabbatai Sevi," the spelling which most closely reflects the Ottoman Turkish pronunciation. I also prefer to render the Ottoman term, دُونْمَه as *Dönme*, instead of *Donmeh*.

The Burden of Silence

| Introduction

How can I tell others that I am Jewish? I have to keep my *silence* all the time. . . . I have to tell others that I am of different faith. . . . This must be the most innocent way of sinning, my friend! Maybe God will be mad at me, and say: “you could confess your faith.” . . . Even Moses was not able to carry such a *burden*. . . . As our famous axiom articulates: “I hid my anguish inside, I did not tell anyone, I kept it secret, and put it asleep” [italics added].¹

HOW AND WHY WOULD anyone (or any community) carry such a *burden of silence* for centuries? This book seeks to answer this question through a historical and religious study of the Dönmes, a group of people who participated in a seventeenth-century Ottoman-Jewish messianic movement and who became members of the resultant Judeo-Islamic crypto-communities in later centuries. Through the use of Ottoman, Turkish, Jewish, and European written and oral sources, the book tells this remarkable story that ties together various themes such as the General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century, messianism, mysticism, orthodoxy, conversion, crypto and hybrid identities, modernism, and memory. More particularly, the book grapples with the following historical questions and places them within a broad historiographical field spanning religious, social, and global history: Why did the Ottoman and Turkish contexts of the movement and its subsequent sectarian developments matter? Why did this global movement spread so rapidly in the early modern world, and then, suddenly, transform itself into a sectarian entity? How did the Dönmes sustain their enigmatic crypto-identities during the transition from early modern to modern times? How did the Dönmes, as a group or individuals, constantly transform and respond to internal and external social

¹ Cited in an anonymous letter in Diyalog, a bimonthly newsletter of the Izmir Jewish community. “Acilar Anlamak (Feeling the Pains),” December 2011, 89–95.

and intellectual pressures and challenges such as messianism, modernism, memory in different time periods? And last, what was the role of the Dönmes in Ottoman and Turkish modernization?

The rise and fall of the Sabbatean movement (1665–1666) is one of the most striking events in early modern history. At a time when religion mattered perhaps the most, tens of thousands of people were motivated by messianic fervor in different parts of the world, halted the course of their daily lives, sold all their valuables, and took to the roads to join the ranks of the messianic claimant, Sabbatai Sevi (1626–1676), on the way to the Promised Land. Soon, however, their great expectations were irrevocably shattered with the unexpected conversion of the messiah to Islam. Its enduring complexity manifested itself on the Jewish collective memory, as Carlebach would put it, in two interrelated but not identical ways: “heretical theology” and “sectarianism.”² But the movement had a continuing legacy not only in Judaism but also in Islam via the Dönmes in the Ottoman Empire and in Christianity via the Frankists (or *Polonyoz* as the Dönmes would call them) in Poland and Eastern Europe.³ There are few historical events as such that impacted several major world religions simultaneously. Although this book makes occasional references to the Jewish and Christian Sabbateans, it mainly focuses on the under-studied history of the “Muslim” Sabbateans, otherwise known as the Dönmes.

After the death of “the converted Messiah” in 1676, his followers began to lead a sectarian life in the Ottoman Empire and developed an apocalyptic theology that blended Jewish, Christian, and Islamic beliefs and rituals. Between 1676 and 1720, the community of believers, now called as Dönmes, split into three subsects as they fought over matters of authenticity and authority. In their tightly guarded communities, the Dönmes managed to sustain their enigmatic and hybrid identity throughout the centuries up to the present. They lived mainly in Ottoman urban areas such as Salonica, Istanbul, and Izmir and eventually became important economic, political, and intellectual actors in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Naturally, their beliefs and practices have been one of the most intriguing and curious subjects for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim observers since the seventeenth century.

In this book, in a set of connected arguments, I show how Sabbatean messianism found receptive religio-socio-political conditions throughout much of the early modern world at an astonishing speed. In response, the Ottoman authorities devised various measures to contain the movement, but they were confronted by crypto-Jewish Dönmes using flexible identities to evade external interference. By the early eighteenth century, the Dönmes had formed three distinct crypto-communities to sustain their overtly Muslim and covertly Jewish identities by following the famous Eighteen Commandments,

² Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moshe Hagis and the Sabbatian Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 8.

³ For Frankists, see Paweł Maciejko, *Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement 1756–1816* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

which provided a set of strict social and religious guidelines intending to ensure the survival of the Dönme communities until the “Second Coming” of the messiah. In the nineteenth century, however, the Dönmes, in increasing number, abandoned their religious identities and embraced secularism, individualism, and other modern ideas as they became involved in developing influential Western-style economic and educational networks in the Ottoman Empire and then Republican Turkey. It was during this process of self-preservation, I argue, that religious and cultural Dönmes internalized the philosophy of a *burden of silence* or philosophy of *maasa duma*,⁴ partly as a result of their internal religious obligations detailed in the Eighteen Commandments and partly because of the external pressure of their surroundings. This philosophy, I think, turned to be the core of the Dönme Kabbala. They came to believe that they must keep their identities secret on pain of “spiritual” and material punishments, which shaped their responses to the internal and external challenges of messianism, modernity, and memory over centuries. Even “emancipated” Dönmes in the twentieth century continued to carry a somewhat traumatic and secularized form of the *burden of silence* with them as do many Dönmes today who hold on to this silence about their past to safeguard their positions in Muslim society.

Although the Dönmes maintained an impenetrable and “forced” silence concerning their private practices and beliefs, their existence had always been an “open secret.” Repressed feelings due to the practice of a *burden of silence*, added yet another layer to the complexity of Dönme history and created a form of cognitive dissonance, a trauma, or, as Houman Sarshar has characterized it in another context, “the anxiety of remembrance” of the past.⁵ For some, there is no greater torment than bearing an untold story inside. The sentiments in the epigraph of this introduction are the words of a contemporary Dönme, yet they echo Dönmes’ laments across the ages.

The curious history of the Dönmes has been examined by students of Jewish, European, and Ottoman history for a number of decades, but the movement and its subsequent developments have not been placed in their proper Ottoman and Turkish social and religious settings. For example, in the

⁴ The term *maasa duma* originates from Isaiah 21:11: “The burden of *Duma*, He, calleth to me out of Seir, ‘Watchman, how far gone is the night? Watchman, how far gone is the night?’ The watchman replies, ‘Morning is coming, but also the night. If you would ask, then ask; and come back yet again.’” It is commonly accepted that this story refers to the Jews in the Babylonian captivity. In one interpretation, *Duma* is the angel of silence and of the stillness of death. Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels* (New York: Free Press 1994), 99. This highly symbolic and obscure term has a wide range of meanings and representations in the Jewish and other esoteric traditions. *Maasa* (its numerical value, gamatria, is 415) can be defined as *work, activity, labour, or burden*. And *dumah* (its numerical value, gamatria, 65) may be defined as *silence*. The gamatria of *maasa dumah* is 480, which is equal to the gamatria of *maasa adonai* (the burden/work of Lord), 480. *Dumah* may also refer to Edom (Christianity) and also the son of Ishmael (Genesis 25:14). Therefore, the term can be also read as a prophecy against Edomites (Christians) or Ishmaelites (Muslims): The Burden of Edomites/Ishmaelites.

⁵ Houman Sarshar, “Foreword,” in Hilda Nissimi, *The Crypto-Jewish Mashhadis* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 7.

thousand pages of Gershom Scholem's magisterial *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (1973), a sense of the physical and social setting of the movement is almost completely absent—the events could have taken place anywhere in the world. With a *longue durée* approach, my work aims to complement, and at times correct, many studies on the subject, including Scholem's *Sabbatai Sevi*, that have contextualized the Sabbatean movement within seventeenth-century Jewish and European religious milieus. It also corrects, on several accounts, Abdurrahman Küçük's *History of Dönmes* [Turkish] (1979), which was the first Turkish academic account of the subject, but one heavily flavored by religio-nationalistic anti-Dönme sentiment. The book also complements Eli-sheva Carlebach's *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moshe Hagis and the Sabbatian Controversy* (1990); Matt Goldish's *The Sabbatean Prophets* (2005); and Ada Rapoport-Albert's *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi, 1666–1816* (2011), which dealt with the movement and its aftermath within the early modern European context. Additionally, it communicates with Jacob Barnai's *Sabbatianism: Social Perspectives* [Hebrew] (2000), which acknowledges the importance of the Turkish sources but does not utilize them exhaustively because of the language barrier. Finally, it responds to numerous questions such as the Dönmes' relations with Muslim mystics and their survival mechanisms in modern times, raised in Marc Baer's important book, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (2009), which, for the first time, used Turkish sources systematically but limited its scope to the social history of the Dönmes in the late Ottoman and early Republican period.

The main purpose of this book is, first, to fill in a significant gap in existing scholarship on the subject and provide more nuance by delineating the larger religious, cultural, and social contexts and, second, to provide a comprehensive social and religious history of the movement and its sectarian developments by bringing the missing the Ottoman-Turkish context into the broader picture.

Before presenting a short summary of the chapters, I would like to comment on the personal and methodological issues involved in studying "secret" communities. Secret and semi-secret societies such as the Dönmes are inherently fascinating but pose numerous challenges as a subject of academic inquiry. Not only is there a paucity of sources because of their silence, but writing on the silence itself raises a moral dilemma about disclosing the society's "secrets." The contemporary existence of the Dönme community makes writing about it or its members even harder. To overcome such challenges, a researcher needs to develop new methodological approaches, particularly because nothing is simple or can be taken at face value in the Dönme histories. One needs to remain constantly aware of the capricious nature of right and wrong in this context. Everything has multiple layers of meaning. Though rarely, this work incorporates even rumors, produced by the Dönmes and their observers. Rumors, as one of the main sources of oral tradition, help generate the message to be transmitted from generation to generation, but traditions based on rumor tell us more about the mentality at the time they are expressed

than about the events themselves, as Vansina states.⁶ This work, then, is about a secret society, but it is also about the observers of that society.

In his work on historical memory, Le Goff makes a distinction between societies whose social memories are “essentially oral” and those whose memories are “essentially written.”⁷ The Dönmes are closer to the former category because most of their “crypto” histories have come down through various forms of oral tradition. Unlike the crypto-Jewish Marrano in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain and Portugal, however, the Dönmes were not subjected to an Inquisition in the Ottoman Empire and were allowed to transmit their memories through different kinds of visible and invisible oral and written “texts,” including prayer books, hymns, architectural masterpieces, graveyards, tombstones, photographs, and cuisines. Every generation, with certain omissions and additions, reconfigured those memories from its teleologically constructed vantage point. The past that was used in that particular moment was not the past itself, but something “filtered,” “imagined,” and “narrated” in accordance with the political opinions, personal background, and temperament of the Dönme and non- Dönme authors. The task of the historian, therefore, as La Goff notes, is to discipline this memory and “render an account of these memories and what is forgotten, to transform them into something that can be conceived.”⁸

According to Smart, all religions possess certain “historical” and “para-historical” dimensions. These dimensions are the practical and the ritual; the experiential and the emotional; the narrative and the mythic; the doctrinal and the philosophical; the ethical and the legal; and the social, institutional, and material. While the “historical” dimension can be studied empirically, the para-historical can only be examined through a dialogue with the members of that religion since it requires an understanding of their beliefs and emotions.⁹ These dimensions are detectable in the Dönme tradition. However, in examining crypto-religions, we need to add a dimension of “secrecy and invisibility,” a dimension shaping all others to some degree. In a crypto-religious context, the more one grasps the “para-historical” dimension, the more one develops a moral dilemma about disclosing the “secrets.” Even if the researcher does not (or cannot) disclose all the secrets entrusted to him or her, these secrets do provide a new type of wisdom to help evaluate and clarify whether the things heard and read about these crypto-societies are plausible. From a professional point of view, however, the researcher is at a disadvantage since he or she cannot furnish enough concrete evidence for some arguments because that evidence might reveal secret knowledge, which could harm existing members of that society.

⁶ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 6.

⁷ Jacques La Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 54.

⁸ La Goff, *History and Memory*, xii.

⁹ Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11–22.

Another challenge that I faced during my studies is the homogenization and conflation of the Dönme subsects by most of their observers. This is a fallacy that I call a “double conflation.” In the first level of conflation, although there are three distinct Dönme subsects – Yakubi, Karakaş and Kapancı, they are generally treated as an undifferentiated and homogenous community. And in the second level of conflation, yet another division among the Dönme subgroups, which began to take effect in the nineteenth century, is not properly recognized. During the modernization period, each subsect was divided once again along the lines of orthodox, reformist, and assimilationist tendencies. In other words, now we had orthodox, reformist, and assimilationist Yakubi, Karakaş, and Kapancı Dönmes. Therefore, different Dönme histories should be acknowledged properly so that we can identify which subsect waned and which subsect survived over time. For instance, the orthodox Karakaş Dönmes outlived all other groups and survived until the present time. And, not surprisingly, contemporary researchers have a tendency to reconstruct all Dönme history from the Orthodox Karakaş perspective since most of our knowledge about the Dönmes comes from their tradition.

The topic of the Dönmes is currently one of the most controversial conspiracy-prone subjects in modern Turkey and in some parts of the Middle East and has been the subject of several speculative and conspiratorial works (and seems likely to be the topic of several new studies in the future). Consequently, I always felt a need for nonsensational academic works about the Dönmes to counterbalance those controversial perspectives without externalizing, homogenizing, and stereotyping them. The conspiracy theories—mostly, but not entirely, emanating from the religious right—would have the Dönmes as a secret branch of world Jewry or, alternatively, Zionism, that undermined the Ottoman regime and played a central role in the empire’s final demise in order to replace it with a secular Turkish republic. In his successful study, Nefes attempts to understand the conspiracy theories around the Dönmes not from a classical approach standpoint that evaluates the conspiracies as political pathologies but rather from a cultural approach standpoint that understands conspiracy theories as social and political symptoms. Based on the evidence gathered from the historical analysis of the conspiracy theories and the interviews with the members of various political parties in Turkey, Nefes concludes that the secrecy of the Dönme community, as perceived by outsiders, plays a significant role in the production and dissemination of the conspiracy theories. Also all political party representatives accept or reject the conspiracy theories pragmatically to verify their own political stances.¹⁰ Other

¹⁰ Turky Salim Nefes, “The Function of Secrecy in Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories: The Case of Dönmes in Turkey,” in *Conspiracy Theories in the United States and the Middle East: A Comparative Approach*, ed. by M. Reinkowski and M. Butter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 139–156. For more on the conspiracy theories about the Dönmes, see Marc Baer, “An Enemy Old and New: The Dönme, Anti-Semitism, and Conspiracy Theories in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 103, 4 (Fall 2013): 523–555.

studies assumed in a teleological fashion that it was only in modern secular Turkey that the Dönme could live a life free of religious or social oppression. Warning the danger of such teleological reasonings, Kafadar points out a general issue in Ottoman and Turkish studies by articulating that most nationalist intellectuals and scholars, influenced by “Kemalist positivism,” have a tendency to treat Ottoman history merely as a background to the inevitable and triumphant emergence of the Turkish nation-state while looking for only certain things in the past with a rigid selectivity.¹¹

Since the mid-1990s, I have been working on the Dönme-related subjects and trying to combine the skills of an Ottomanist/Islamist with those of scholars on Judaic and European studies. Over the years, the very process of studying the Dönmes became as interesting as the subject itself. The secret nature of the topic and the natural scarcity of sources took me on numerous twists, turns, and difficulties in my research and writing but also led to numerous illuminations thanks to new sources and discussions with several contemporary Dönmes, whose “anxiety of remembrance” was lifted and “burden of silence” broken in my presence. They broke their silence not in interviews in a traditional sense but rather in our numerous conversations over the years as we developed mutual trust, admiration, and friendship. Talking to an “outsider” like me was a “sin,” which is why I will not reveal their names or some of their “secrets” in my work out of respect.

As a result of my long-term engagement in oral and written traditions of the Dönmes, as well as my reflections on the previously mentioned methodological issues, I was forced to revise some of my earlier assumptions and arguments, which were presented in my dissertation (2004) and Turkish book, *Sabatay Sevi ve Sabataycılar* (Sabbatai Sevi and Sabbateans, 2007) about Dönme history. New sources, especially Ottoman archival documents, nineteenth-century missionary records, and twentieth-century accounts of [Dönme] Yalman (1924),¹² [Dönme] Karakaş Rüştü (1924–1925), [Dönme] Gövsa (1925 and 1939),¹³ and [possibly Dönme] Oruç (1927),¹⁴ as well as the important testimonies of contemporary Dönmes, helped me to consider the historical issues as a well-informed outsider and reconsider some of my previous assumptions and arguments about the Dönme secrets, the extent of the Dönmes’ relations with Sufism, and the (mis)perceptions of their existence in contemporary times.

¹¹ Cemal Kafadar, “Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature,” *Studia Islamica*, 69 (1989), 126.

¹² Ahmet Emin Yalman published his account in ten installments under the pen name of Bir Tarık Müdekkiki (A Curious Historian), “Tarihin Esrarengiz Bir Sahifesi” (A Mysterious Page from History), *Vatan Daily*, January 11–22, 1924.

¹³ İbrahim Alaattin Gövsa, *Sabatay Sevi* (İstanbul: Semih Lutfi Kitapevi, 1940?).

¹⁴ Arif Oruç wrote his account in eighty-four installments under the pen name of Ayhan in the format of a historical novella, called “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı Nasıl İnkışaf Etti?” (How did the Dönmesip Emerge and Disseminate?), *Son Saat Daily*, May 24–August 20, 1927.

I believe that anyone who has studied such historic and contemporary secret societies as the Marranos or the Moriscos of Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; the Huguenots of France in the seventeenth century; the Mashadis/Jadidim of Iran in the nineteenth century; or the Bogomils, Hubmesihis, Kromlides, Istavris, Hemsinlis, and Vallahades in the Ottoman Empire faces the same difficulties and sporadic illuminations along the way.

Aiming to present a comprehensive history of this movement and its sectarian developments, the book is structured in eight chapters. Keeping the main narrative of the events at the core, each chapter is written to engage broader political, social, intellectual, and cultural issues. The first chapter deals with the life of Sabbatai Sevi (1626–1676) up to the emergence of the messianic movement in 1665. An attempt to understand a mass movement and not merely a messianic figure or a small messianic circle should take broader religious and historical as well as sociological, political, and economic factors into consideration. Therefore, I argue that the Ottoman political, social, economic, and religious context was one of the most important factors in shaping the reception, dissemination, and trajectory of the movement. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire witnessed a series of crises and changes on economic, political, military, and religio-spiritual levels. The resulting wars, violent outbreaks, and their cruel suppressions have caused the century to be seen by many historians as, alternately, an “age of decline,” or “age of crisis and change.” The Sabbatean movement flourished against the backdrop of the disruptions of this century.

The second chapter interprets the ebbs and flows of Sabbateanism as the movement reached its climax by affecting Jewish and Christian millenarian communities within a larger Eurasian context. When Ottoman authorities forced Sevi to convert to Islam on the pain of death, the movement came to an end, but some of the messianic believers formed a crypto-sect. In this chapter, I present an account of the transformation of Sevi and his followers to their converted Muslim identities. A thorough reading of the new and existing sources offers us clearer answers to questions that have been debated among scholars, such as the magnitude of the movement, the level of the sultan’s involvement in the Sabbatean affair, and the position that Sevi was granted upon his conversion. Based on the Ottoman narrative and archival sources, the main arguments of the chapter are that the Ottomans perceived the Sabbatean movement simply as a heretical religious movement (*fîne*), not as a political resistance movement with a possible violent course (*huruc*). Consequently, the destiny of the Sabbatean movement resembled that led by other Ottoman nonconformist figures and movements that went underground and experienced sectarian lives. Second—and contrary to the common assumptions—the impact of the movement was not as powerful and widespread in the Ottoman Empire as it was within the Jewish and Christian communities of Europe. This, I argue, was due to a relative dearth

of millennial preoccupations among the Ottoman Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

The third chapter deals with the life of Sabbatai Sevi until his death. After the conversion, he lived ten more years, a decade full of twists and turns between Islam and Judaism. He began this new life as Aziz Mehmet Efendi b. Abdullah at the Edirne palace in 1666 and ended in a hybrid identity, as Sabbatai Mehmet Sevi in exile in Albania in 1676. Events around the conversion and his new identity were fashioned and refashioned during those years both by himself and by his followers. The dialectic between his self-perception, the perceptions of his followers, and those of the Ottoman authorities caused his identity to oscillate between the borders of Judaism and Islam, ultimately resulting in the emergence of an idiosyncratic messianic community which later came to be known as Dönme. Most important, he formulated the parameters of his “secret” by assigning new meanings to the Godhead and shared it with his “chosen of the chosen” followers. This was also the time that the *burden of silence* began to be part of the Dönme Kabbala.

The fourth chapter deals with the formative period of the Dönme sub-communities between 1676 and 1720, particularly in what happens to religious communities “when the prophecy fails.” When the prophecy of messianic triumph failed, scattered constellations of messianic believers turned into self-conscious messianic communities and organized themselves around certain social and religious principles, known as the Eighteen Commandments, which detail the principles of the *burden of silence*. These Commandments, I believe, are essential to the perpetuation of the Dönme communal identity and praxis over the centuries. The community was divided into three subgroups as a result of disagreements over the identity of the true bearer of the messianic soul. These groups created three Sabbateanisms, which were called by many different names but finally came to be canonized as Yakubi, Karakaş, and Kapancı in the twentieth century. The chapter also discusses the meaning of being a religious community in early modern Ottoman Empire.

The fifth chapter carefully reconstructs the full development of “open secret” or “crypto-communities” in the so-called Dönme dark age in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in relation to similar phenomena such as those experienced by the Frankists in eastern and central Europe. I argue that the period was a very critical moment for the Dönmes since they “silently” developed their idiosyncratic theological arguments and social practices that enabled them to maintain their own parallel messianic self-government. In the meantime, the relationship between the Dönmes and crypto-Sabbateans in Europe never ceased.

The sixth chapter deals with the question of how the Dönme communities sustained their enigmatic social and religious identities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and also explore the possibility of constructing the

framework of the Dönme Kabbala. In discussing the issue, the chapter expands the frame to incorporate similar crypto-Jewish cases such as the Marranos in the Iberian Peninsula and Mashadis in Iran.¹⁵ The short answer to this survival question is the aforementioned Eighteen Commandments that provided the Dönmes with spiritual and material guidance and a framework for praxis. In order to practice their crypto-life and transmit their knowledge to future generations, the Dönmes created a parallel space and time zone in which they had their own cemeteries, prayer houses, ceremonies, charities, and even courts. In this world, women mostly stayed at home, carrying the culture and transmitting “the knowledge” to future generations, while the men acted in a sort of “go-between” role between the parallel worlds. In their parallel worlds, I argue, the Dönme subsects fashioned and refashioned themselves within a post-messianic and mystical Jewish world, and created their own version of Kabbala. In classical Lurianic Kabbala,¹⁶ this world is simply described as the *atzilut* (world of emanation), which was the highest of four spiritual worlds (*assiah*, *yetzirah*, *beria*, and *atzilut*). The *atzilut* world starts when the messiah comes and annuls the law of the existing world of *beria* (creation), initiating the messianic age, and replacing the Torah of *beria* with that of *atzilut*. However, there was one curious point for the Dönme Kabbala, which separated them from the traditional Jewish messianic imagination. They believed that the messiah had already come but then went into occultation until the final redemption. According to this new messianic theology, the messiah gave them the glad tiding of the coming of the messianic age, and then put them to sleep under a very thin veil. The soul of the messiah

¹⁵ In 1839, Mashadi Jews in Iran were forced to convert to Islam. While some managed to escape, the rest adopted Islam only outwardly. Most of their descendants emigrated to the West in the twentieth century and returned to Judaism. Raphael Patai, *Jadid al-Islam: The Jewish “New Muslims” of Meshhed* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997); Hilda Nissimi, *The Crypto-Jewish Mashhadis*.

¹⁶ Lurianic Kabbala was developed by Isaac Luria of Ottoman Safed (1534–1572). Also known as Ari, Luria was one of the greatest mystics in world history, and profoundly influenced all subsequent kabbalists and other mystics. At the heart of his highly complex doctrine lies his full-fledged mythological explanation for God’s creation of the universe and the existence of evil in it. Simply put, according to this explanation, in the beginning there was only God. One day, God decided to create the universe. But for creation, he needed to prepare a space within himself, because there was no other place outside of him. He contracted himself and created an empty space, like a void. In order to eliminate all the darkness and evil forces within the void, God devised a gigantic apparatus which had had ten vessels through which he planned to send his primordial divine light and illuminate all the dark corners of this void. But, something went terribly wrong with this plan. The vessels were shattered (*Shevirat ha-Kelim*) by the burden and influx of divine light. The sparks (*nitzotzot*), big and small, of the primordial light were scattered all around and trapped in evil shells (*gelippot*). These formed the origins of evil and personal suffering in this world. God failed to create a perfect universe, and he needed help to mend the vessel and complete creation. For that he created humans and sent them into this incomplete, imperfect, and shattered universe. By observing the commandments, humans could rescue the sparks of light from the evil shells, and restore them back into the vessels, and help God in mending the shattered universe (*tiqqun ha-olam*). The last big spark, however, could only be rescued by Messiah. One of the most important implications of this system is shifting the responsibility for the fallen state of existence from Adam and Eve to God, and putting human in charge of mending the universe. Also see Chapter 4. For a detailed exposition of the Lurianic Kabbala, see Gershon Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah 1626–76* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 22–43.

will return as a member of one of the chosen Dönme families. This theosophy can be best seen in an epitaph, carved on one of the Karakaş tombstones, which reads: “Sakladım söyleyemedim derdimi gizli tuttum uyuttum” (I hid my anguish inside, I could not tell anyone, I kept it secret, and put it asleep). Thinking of themselves as the “chosen of the chosen,” they were supposed to observe the Eighteen Commandments, including the observance of an Islamic lifestyle and religious practice in public; the belief in Sabbatai’s Second Coming; the practice of endogamy; and the transgression of some existing Jewish *Halakhic* prohibitions, such as the eating of pork, the indulging in illicit sexual practices, or the breaking of the Shabbat rules, and holding on to the *burden of silence*.

The seventh chapter deals with the creation of a new “emancipated” Dönme elite as a result of modernization and secularization at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. While some of the Dönmes wanted to retain their orthodox values, others wanted to reform them, and still others wanted to get rid of them altogether. In his book on *Conversos*, José Faur argues that Conversos or Marranos (forced Jewish converts to Christianity in the fourteenth through the sixteenth century Spain and Portuguese) were a factor in the collapse of the ecclesiastical society of the Middle Ages as well as in the rise of secularism and modernity.¹⁷ I think that this argument holds true for the Dönmes vis-à-vis the Turkish experience with modernity and secularism. Without being trapped by teleological reasoning, I suggest that the Dönmes were an important factor behind the Ottoman and Turkish modernization project. Salonica was the engine of Ottoman-Turkish modernization and the Dönmes were extremely important—possibly the most influential group of people in the city—in this modernization. The establishment of modern schools in the late nineteenth century, the first visible Dönme institutions in Salonica; the group’s considerable power in the city’s international trade and economy; their extensive travels and education in Europe; and their increasing political involvement in the city’s affairs all led to the formation of a new, secular, and non-sectarian Dönme elite. The tension between the orthodox and “emancipated” Dönmes played a key role in the economic political, intellectual, educational, and media life of Salonica, and greatly contributed to the modernization and internationalization of the city. The new Dönme elite became ardent supporters and members of the city’s burgeoning Freemasonic lodges; the Young Turk Movement and its political manifestation, the Committee of Union and Progress; and eventually, the early Turkish Republican elite as soldiers, politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats, businessmen, journalists, doctors, lawyers, and professors.

The eighth chapter brings the book to a close by placing crypto-religious communities such as the Sabbateans at the heart of the birth of nation-states in the modern world; thus they are entangled in all manner of political,

¹⁷ Jose Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).

economic, and social issues such as migration politics, modern citizenship, conspiracy theories, cultural politics, and hybrid ethnic and religious identities. In these periods, even emancipated and secularized Dönmes continued to carry this *burden of silence* with them to protect their positions in Muslim society.

Although the scope of this book covers the time period between the seventeenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, it sheds light on our contemporary period as well since the story of the Dönme communities in modern Turkey has remained largely the same, with two important modifications: first, as the number of the assimilated Dönmes was growing, the number of Orthodox Dönmes has been continuously dwindling due to over-secularization and mixed marriages; second, the traditional dividing lines among the Dönme communities have blurred, and a new dividing line has emerged: the “believers” and “non-believers” or “cultural Dönmes.” Today, an estimated 60,000–70,000 persons of Dönme origin live in Turkey and perhaps another 10,000 more in other parts of the world. Of those cultural Dönmes, only 3,000–4,000 are thought to remain orthodox believers, as can be observed in their neatly prepared religious calendars, cookbooks, graveyards, and tombstones.

I believe that the study of this transreligious and transregional movement both in history and contemporary times is linked to many major issues in European, Islamic, Ottoman, Turkish, and Jewish studies. I hope this book will contribute to Ottoman and Islamic studies in understanding different Islamic attitudes (tolerance or lack thereof) toward conversion, apostasy, “crypto-believers,” non-Muslims, and identity politics; to religious studies in understanding the survival strategies of crypto-communities; to Jewish studies in understanding “post-messianic Jews”; and to global historical studies in interrelating the Eurasian world in early modern and modern times.

Remapping a Messianic Movement in the Early Modern World

IN 1666, THE OTTOMAN Empire witnessed one of the biggest messianic movements in its history. The influence of the movement was felt even more strongly outside the empire borders. Although its complicated roots went back to earlier decades and even centuries, the Sabbatean mass movement began in Ottoman Jerusalem in May 1665, when Sabbatai Sevi (Figure 1.1) proclaimed himself to be the long-awaited Jewish messiah. “What exactly were the decisive factors that brought about the messianic outbreak?” This is Scholem’s famous question in the opening chapter of his magnum opus, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*.¹ Criticizing earlier scholarship that ascribed the rise of the movement to a monocause, that is, the massacre of Polish Jewry in 1648–1649, Scholem advanced a detailed yet highly controversial argument for the rapid dissemination of the movement, though he, too, maintained a near moncausal explanation. To him, the main cause was the spread of Lurianic Kabbala in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which attracted Jews in Afro-Eurasia to the Sabbatean movement.

Scholem’s argument was either qualified or criticized by leading Jewish and European scholars such as Yitzhak Ben-Zwi, Moshe Idel, Yehuda Liebes, Jacob Barnai, Elliot Wolfson, Abraham Elqayam, Ada Rapoport, and Matt Goldish. Those who criticized Scholem’s near moncause explanation developed alternative explanations and contributing factors for how this popular Jewish eschatology spread so fast and wide across the borders. Some of the major alternative and complementary explanations to Scholem’s thesis are popular belief, especially the Marrano belief in the messiah following the catastrophic Spanish expulsion of Jews after the fifteenth century;² acute Jewish messianism in the sixteenth century;³ the impact of pre-Lurianic

¹ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 1.

² Jacob Barnai, *Sabbatianism: Social Perspectives* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2000); Y. H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

³ Isaiah Tishby, “Acute Apocalyptic Messianism,” in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 259–289.



FIGURE 1.1 A portrait of Sabbatai Sevi, 1660s. Taken from an anonymous book, published in 1667: *Relation de la véritable imposture du faux messie des juifs nommé Sabbatay Sevi: juif natif de Smyrne, maintenant nommé Achis Mehemet Aga, Turc, portier du Serrail du grand Seigneur/escrite de Constantinople le vingt-deuxiesme novembre 1666 par un religieux digne de foy, fidelle tesmoing de ce qu'il escrit, & envoyée à un de ses amis à Marseille* (Avignon: Chez Michel Chastel, 1667).

Ecstatic and Byzantine Kabbalah beliefs;⁴ Sabbatai Sevi's own religious faith and self-perception;⁵ Kabbalistic interpretations of Sabbatai as the "divine androgyne," embodying certain relationships between the mystical emanations, sephirot;⁶ Nathan of Gaza's influence on Sabbateanism;⁷ and shared

⁴ Moshe, *Idel Messianic Mystics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1998); Idel, "One from a Town and Two from a Family: A New Look at the Problem of Dissemination of Lurianic Kabbala and the Sabbatean Movement," *Jewish History* 7 (1993): 79–104.

⁵ Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); Liebes, *Sod ha-Emunah ha-Shabtai: Kovets Maamarim* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1995).

⁶ Elliot Wolfson, "The Engenderment of Messianic Politics: Symbolic Significance of Sabbatai Sevi's Coronation," in *Toward the Millennium*, ed. P. Shafer and M. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 204–254.

⁷ Abraham Elqayam, "The Mystery of Faith in the Writings of Nathan of Gaza" [Hebrew], unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Hebrew University, 1993); Elqayam, "Sabbatai Sevi's Holy Zohar," [Hebrew] *Kabbalah* 3 (1998): 345–387.

enthusiasm and millenarian expectations of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.⁸ Although some of these arguments acknowledged the importance of the Ottoman context in explaining the rise, dissemination, and reception of the Sabbatean movement, none of them integrated the “Ottoman factor” into their conceptual analysis in a systematic fashion. An attempt to understand a mass movement and not merely a messianic figure should take a broader context into consideration. As amply demonstrated in studies on Hassidism, another widespread Jewish mystical-messianic movement in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, studying the socioeconomic and cultural context of the religious movements provides us a deeper understanding of their developments and their connection to other histories.⁹ Ruderman, with the same concern in mind, demonstrates how Jew communities in the early modern period were linked to one another in fascinating ways. To him, especially two early modern figures, Sabbatai Sevi and Marrano-origin Baruch Spinoza, changed Jewish religious and cultural landscapes forever.¹⁰ Without denying the importance of Jewish Kabbalistic or Christian Millenarian developments, therefore, the aim of this chapter is to add this missing element to the larger picture of the movement and to argue that the Ottoman political, social, economic, and religious context was one of the most important factors in shaping the reception, dissemination, and trajectory of the Sabbatean movement.

Several interconnected arguments are utilized in demonstrating the significance of the larger Ottoman context. The Ottoman Empire witnessed a series of crises and transformations on economic, political, military, and religio-spiritual levels throughout the seventeenth century. The resulting wars, major violent rebellions, and their cruel repressions by the Ottoman authorities have caused the century to be interpreted as an “reign of violence,” an “age of decline,” an “age of crisis and change,”¹¹ and the time for “the second empire.”¹² Ottoman Jews, being one of the largest Jewish communities in the world, were not immune to crisis, changes, and “violence” of the time.

Throughout Ottoman history, some major digressive “events” aside, the “trend” of the Ottoman-Jewish relationship, in the Braudelian sense, was relatively peaceful in comparison to the Jewish experience in Europe. One of those

⁸ Matt Goldish and Richard Popkin, *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture* (London: Kluwer, 2001); Popkin, “Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenarianism,” in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 67–90.

⁹ For the socioeconomic context of Hassidism, see Jay Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba’al Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁰ David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹¹ Suraiya Faroqhi, “Crisis and Change, 1590–1699,” in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, ed. H. Inalcik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 411–623.

¹² Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Agreeing that decline took place in certain areas, Tezcan claims that those crises were the harbingers of the proto-democratization of the Ottoman polity.

digressions was in the seventeenth century when a significant number of Jews began losing their dominance in traditional businesses such as medicine, tax farming, money lending, purveying for the palace, and mediating between the Ottomans and the Europeans. Although there was no Jewish pogrom in the empire, outbreaks of anti-Jewish sentiment increased Jewish insecurity, with events such as the brutal murder of Ester Kyra and some wealthy Jews in 1600¹³ and expulsion of the Jews from lucrative centers of Istanbul to its outskirts after a major conflagration in 1660. Influential philanthropists such as Moses Hamon, Dona Gracia Mendes, Joseph Nasi, Salomon Nathan Eskenazi, and Ester Kyra who played an intermediary role between the state and Jewish communities in the sixteenth century were no longer part of the seventeenth century. In a way, the “Golden Age”¹⁴ of the sixteenth century was replaced with a century of increasing economic, political, and religious instability for the Ottoman Jews. Their anxieties and sense of “decline” were reflected in the contemporary Ottoman and Jewish sources. For example, as shown by Ben-Naeh, Hebrew texts from the seventeenth century onward explicitly described the difficult conditions Jews were experiencing in the empire and an increasingly bitter view by Jews of the Muslims.¹⁵

Such challenges made the Ottoman Jews susceptible to a comforting messianic call. Sevi’s invitation, which promised a better life, could not have been timelier for these suffering souls. Still, however, as discussed in the next chapter, the movement was not as widespread and catastrophic in the empire as it was among the European Christian and Jewish communities.

The “Messiah” of an Ottoman City

Sabbatai Sevi was born to a moderately wealthy Jewish family in a fledgling Ottoman city, Izmir, sometimes in mid-August (Tisha be-Av, according to the Jewish calendar) in 1626. He was named Sabbatai, like many other Jewish infants who were born on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, when the Jews are supposed to rest and engage in spiritual enrichment and to look forward the Messianic age. Between the 1570s and the 1650s his hometown had developed from a port of purely local importance into a major international

¹³ Salomon Rosanes, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael be-Togarmah ‘al pi Mekorot Rishonim* (Sofia: Devir, 1933), III: 364–375.

¹⁴ Although controversial, starting from Salo Baron, most of the historians of the Ottoman Jewry consider the sixteenth century as yet another golden age, next to the tenth century Abbasid Bagdad, and eleventh century al-Andulus. The overgeneralized labels of “golden age,” “tolerance,” or lack thereof were preferred as analytical tools in describing the status of the Jews under Muslims in modern scholarship, depending on authors’ present political and religious agendas. Mark Cohen rightly describes these two opposite attitudes in the studies of Jewish-Muslim relations as myth and counter myth. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–14.

¹⁵ Yaron Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans: Ottoman Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 139–141.

hub. This was the result of changing internal Ottoman dynamics and international factors. Muslims, Jews, and Christians migrating during the protracted rebellions, came to be known as Celalis,¹⁶ in Anatolia at the turn of the seventeenth century and subsequent state terror visited on the rebels. In the meantime, the city became an attraction point for the growing international English, French, and Dutch trade. When the Silk Road was extended to Izmir in the 1620s, the city's development was boosted even further. By the mid-seventeenth century, several European travelers described the city as a rich and prosperous commercial center and as the largest and finest port in the Levant.¹⁷

Jews came to Izmir not only because of the chaos in Anatolia but also because of difficult conditions created by the decay of the traditional Jewish textile industry in Salonica, Aleppo, and Safed. After the founding of the English Levant Company in Istanbul, Izmir, and Aleppo in the 1580s, English merchants were able to sell wool at drastically reduced prices in all world markets, and that eventually was a blow to Jewish communities whose livelihood mostly depended on the textile industry.¹⁸ Jews immigrated here mainly from Manisa, Tire, Bergama, Safed, Salonica, Istanbul, Ankara, the Aegean and Mediterranean islands, Italy, and Holland. A new wave of Ashkenazi emigration to the empire took place in those years as well. These emigrants came as refugees or prisoners from Eastern Europe as a result of worsening conditions or wars between the Turks and Poles. Thousands of Jews, including rabbis, were sold in the slave markets of the empire. Although some of them were ransomed and returned to their homelands, the rest chose to remain in the empire. By the 1650s, the Jewish population of Izmir had reached about 7,000 and they were living alongside 15,000 Greeks and 60,000 Muslims.¹⁹

The Sevi family was a recent immigrant in the city. The father Mordecai came from Greece, probably from a family of Ashkenazi or Romaniot origin, and worked as an agent for Dutch and English companies in Izmir. Unlike his brothers, Elijah and Joseph, who had their own businesses, Sabbatai developed a great interest in metaphysical issues.²⁰ After attending traditional Jewish Talmud-Torah schools, he studied under learned men of the city, such as Isaac de Alba and later Joseph Escapa. Very adept at traditional learning, he was ordained as a rabbi when he was only eighteen. Meanwhile, the Izmir Jewish community continued to expand as Jews built their neighborhoods,

¹⁶ For the Celali rebellions, and their impacts, see Oktay Ozel, "The Reign of Violence: The Celalis (c.1550–1700)," in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2013), 184–204.

¹⁷ For the rise of Izmir, see Daniel Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World 1550–1650* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Faroqhi, "Crisis and Change," 505.

¹⁹ Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World*, 83.

²⁰ Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire from the Year 1623 to the Year 1677* (London: Printed by J. M. for John Starkey, 1680), 201.



FIGURE 1.2 The Sabbatai Sevi house in ruins, Izmir, 2010. Photo courtesy of the author.

synagogues, schools, and workshops in and around the Kemeraltı market and neighborhood where the Sevi's house (Figure 1.2) was located.²¹

Although Jews and Christians—that is, non-Muslims, technically known as *dhimmis*—lived within a legally defined framework in the empire, at most times this framework was not enforced strictly, except in times of political crisis and greater piety. De jure *dhimmis* were not allowed to build new temples, but de facto, new churches and synagogues were frequently being erected in the Balkans and Anatolia. For example, there were only three synagogues in Istanbul in 1453, but seventeen synagogues two centuries later. Likewise, Izmir had three synagogues in the 1620s, six in the 1640s, and nine in the 1650s. The earlier congregations, *kehalim*, were founded by immigrants from Anatolia, and the rest were founded by Salonian, Portuguese, and Spanish immigrants.

As the Jewish community grew in Izmir, intra-congregational rivalries gained momentum. In the absence of an empire-wide central Jewish authority, each congregation wanted to impose its own religious and social traditions on the newly emerging community. For example, Rabbi Joshua Ashkenazi of Salonika (d.1647), who was an influential communal leader, was not in

²¹ For Sabbatai's house, see Cengiz Sisman, "Cortijo de Sevi as Lieu de Mémoire: The Past, Present, and Future of Sabbatai Sevi's House," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 11:1 (2012): 61–84.

agreement with the first chief rabbi of the city, Rabbi Joseph Escapa of Salonika (d.1662), who presided over all the congregations from the 1630s onward, with regard to the practice of certain Jewish traditions such as dietary laws, ritual slaughter, and Tisha be-Av, the Jewish mourning day for commemorating the destruction of the Temple. Such differences grew into a major schism within the Izmir community; but with the involvement of Chief Rabbi Fresco of Istanbul, who was hierarchically above all the chief rabbis in other Ottoman cities, the communal schism ended until the breakout of the Sabbatean affair in 1665.

The Early Modern Ottoman Crisis, Ottoman Jewry, and the Sabbatean Movement

Although few cities including Izmir were thriving, the rest of the empire was struggling with social, economic, and political problems in the seventeenth century. Without getting into the details of a rich discussion on the Ottoman “golden age” in the sixteenth century, and the Ottoman “decline” thereafter, it suffices to say that both the declinists and their critics acknowledge the fact that the empire witnessed crisis and changes on many different grounds. Several contemporary Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals, such as Mustafa Ali, Koçi Bey, Katip Çelebi, Hazerfan Hüseyin Efendi, and Naima addressed the challenges of the time faced by the empire. Fierce power struggles at the palace and a resulting decline in sultanic power was one indication of those problems. Out of the eleven sultans in the seventeenth century, three were assassinated and five were deposed. In contrast, in the sixteenth century there were five sultans, and only two of them were deposed. Likewise, an unprecedented high number of grand viziers were deposed or killed on charges of corruption or mismanagement. Between 1638 and 1656, for example, nineteen grand viziers served in the office.

Global development such as changing trade routes, “exploration” of the new world, and a silver influx irreversibly altered the balance of power in the early modern Ottoman, Safavid, and the Mughal empires. The Ottoman currency, *akçe*, for example, was radically debased, and prices and budget deficits were irrevocably augmented.²²

The period also saw a big change in the land tenure (*timar*) and military systems. The Janissary institution, which was limited to converted *dhimmis*, opened its gates to the Muslims. The size and importance of the cavalry decreased, accompanied by a decline in the institution of land tenure *timar*,

²² The effect of American silver on Mediterranean economies was shown by Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). Braudel's approach and findings were repeated by Omer Lutfu Barkan in the Ottoman context. Barkan, “The Price Revolution of the Sixteenth Century: A Turning Point in the Economic History of the Near East,” *IJMES* 6 (1975): 3–28.

leading to the rise of new Muslim provincial elites as part of the military administration.

Protracted military campaigns on the western and eastern fronts exhausted the Ottomans and presented extra economic and social hardships for both urban and rural populations. Throughout the century, the Ottomans were constantly at war with Catholic Habsburgs (1593–1606, 1663, 1683, 1699); Venetians (1645–1669); Iran (1603–1638); and Poland, Ukraine, and Muscovy (1600–1681). There was hardly any year in the century in which the empire was free of war mobilization and expenses. Together with the financial and mercantilist developments in Europe and the Mughal Empire, a classical provisionalist and protective market, which prohibits exportation and encourages importation resulted in a constant monetary deficit. These developments brought further currency devaluation and increased taxation in every sector of life.

Also, as Kunt claims, in the seventeenth century Ottoman polity experienced a process of “Islamization,” which in the end changed the main dividing line in society from one between the *askeri* (ruling class) and the *reaya* (ruled class) to one between Muslims and *dhimmis*. To him, the empire became more actively Sunni as the Ottoman self-image became that of the defender of Islam, not only against Christian Europe but also against the Safavids Shia “heretics.”²³ That is why the Shia-inclined Anatolian Kızılbaş communities were perceived as subversive and were violently repressed several times. Eminent Ottoman historian Mehmet Genç insightfully suggests that the real transition from *askeri-reaya* binary to Muslim-Non-Muslim (*ehli Islamyayı Muslim*) binary took place in the early 1700s and institutionalized during the 1820s.²⁴ A full examination of this major transformation still awaits to be executed. Analyzing confessional polarization and “sunnitization” of the Ottoman Empire, Krstic and Terzioğlu argue that especially the production and circulation of narratives about conversion to Islam²⁵ and Islamic manuals of religious instruction²⁶ were central to the articulation of Ottoman imperial Sunni identity, starting from the sixteenth century. As discussed later, the “orthodox” Kadızadeli movement emerged against the backdrop of these developments and became part of the state ideology in the second half of the seventeenth century, shaping, among other things, the trajectory of the Sabeatean movement.

These economic, political, and religious instabilities resulted in violence and terror all over the empire. Merchants and Janissaries clashed in Istanbul

²³ Metin Kunt, “Transformation of Zimmi into Askeri,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Benjamin Braude (New York: Holmes, 1982), 63.

²⁴ Personal communications with Mehmet Genç.

²⁵ Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 12–15.

²⁶ Derin Terzioglu, “Where Ilmihal Meets Catechism: Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization,” *Past and Present* 220 (2013): 79.

as a result of troubles generated by the value of debased money in 1590, 1650, and 1656. As Barkey notes, “the central challenge to the Ottoman state during the seventeenth century came not in the form of peasant or elite rebellions but as banditry.”²⁷ It is believed that some 80,000 Celali rebels and bandits were killed by Grand Vizier Kuyucu Murat Pasha just in 1606–1608. These revolts, which occurred in 1595–1610, 1654–1655, and 1658–1659, were the largest and longest lasting in the Ottoman history, resulting heavy death tolls and displacing thousands of people across the empire.²⁸

As the empire had been experiencing major transformations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman Jews had been following more or less the same historical trajectory with it. The Ottoman Jews came from different parts of the world and over centuries became an integral part of this Ottoman economy and society and occupied important, if not unique, positions such as ambassadors, political advisors, tax collectors, private bankers,²⁹ Ocakbezorganis (the merchant-banker of the Janissary corps),³⁰ physicians,³¹ and court musicians.³² Greek-speaking Romaniots and Karaites who had been living in the former Byzantine territory constituted the first congregations. The variety of places of origin gave way to the emergence of several new congregations in major Ottoman cities. At the end of the fifteenth century, Rabbi Tsarfati of Edirne, in his well-known letter to European Jewry, described the Ottoman Empire not merely as a place of refuge but also as a land of economic opportunity where, unlike anywhere else, Jews could live and practice their religion freely.³³ This call caused a wave of Askhenazi migration to the empire. Then came the Sephardic Jews and Marranos, who had been chastised and expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Because of that, it was not surprising to see sixteenth-century Jewish writers such as Elijah Capsali, Joseph ha-Kohen, and Samuel Usque express similar and sometimes exaggeratedly positive opinions about the Ottoman Empire. For example, Capsali, using a messianic vocabulary, likened Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent to King Solomon, as an emancipator and protector

²⁷ Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), x.

²⁸ Ozel, “The Reign of Violence: The Celalis (c.1550–1700).”

²⁹ Halil Inalcik, “Jews in the Ottoman Economy and Finances, 1450–1500,” in *Islamic World from Classic to Modern Times*, ed. C. E. Bosworth (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 513–550.

³⁰ Stanford Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 148–149.

³¹ Bernard Lewis, “The Privilege Granted by Mehmed II to His Physician,” *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (1952): 550–563; and Uriel Heyd, “Moses Hamon, Chief Jewish Physician to Suleiman the Magnificent,” *Oriens* 16 (1963): 152–171.

³² Pamela, Sezgin, “Hakhamim, Dervishes and the Court Singers,” in *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor, Levy (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1994), 575–585.

³³ Franz Kobler, *A Treasury of Jewish Letters* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1953), 53.

of the Jews.³⁴ In the 1540s, addressing mostly the Marranos, who were under tremendous pressure in Europe, Usque described the empire as a place where “the gates of liberty are always wide open for you that you may fully practice your Judaism. Here you may restore your true character, transform your true nature, change your ways, and banish false and erring opinions.”³⁵

Positive evaluations of the general status of the Ottoman Jewry have been shared by several modern scholars such as Salo Baron, Bernard Lewis, Stanford Shaw, and Avigdor Levy. Levy claims that the Ottomans treated their non-Muslim subjects well for three reasons: first, the Ottomans followed the Hanafi legal rite of Sunni Islam, the most tolerant Muslim school of law. Second, the Ottomans had a large proportion of non-Muslim subjects before their conquest of the Arab lands in the early sixteenth century, but afterward, with a much larger Muslim population, conservatism increased. Finally, Ottoman law was pragmatic and allowed secular sultanic regulations called *kanuns*.³⁶ Important exceptions challenged those over-sweeping positive opinions, however. For example, the Jews were forced to migrate from one place to another in order to populate newly conquered lands in Constantinople in 1453 and in Cyprus in 1571.³⁷ At other times, their properties were arbitrarily confiscated on the basis of alleged mismanagement or abuse, as in the case of construction of the New Mosque in Istanbul in 1597 and 1661.³⁸

The proportion of Sephardic Jews within the Ottoman Jewry increased in the first half of the sixteenth century when the Ottomans conquered the Arabic lands where Sephardic Jews had already been established. The Ottoman conquests of Arab lands added yet another layer of Ottoman Jews: Musta’rabs, the Arab-speaking Jews. By the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Jewry constituted one of the largest Jewish communities in the world, totaling approximately 150,000–200,000 souls, mostly living in major cities such as Istanbul (30,000–40,000); Salonica (30,000–40,000); Cairo, Belgrade, Izmir (5,000–7,000); Edirne (4,000–5,000); and Safed, Aleppo, and Jerusalem (3,000–4,000).

Sephardic Jews, and especially the Marranos, or in the vocabulary of Benardete, “renaissance Jews,”³⁹ brought into the Ottoman lands European

³⁴ Charles Berlin, “A Sixteenth Century Hebrew Chronicle of the Ottoman Empire: The *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* of Elijah Capsali,” in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature*, ed. Charles Berlin (New York: Ktav, 1971), 21–44.

³⁵ Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), 231.

³⁶ Levy, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 17.

³⁷ Joseph Hacker, “Surgun System and Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire,” in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*, ed. Aron Rodrigue (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 1–67.

³⁸ Lucienne Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders: The Architectural Patronage of Hadice Turhan Sultan* (London: Ashgate, 2007), 187–256; and Marc Baer, “The Great Fire of 1660 and the Islamization of Christian and Jewish Space in Istanbul,” *IJMES*, 36:2 (2004): 159–181.

³⁹ Meir Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of Sephardic Jews* (New York: Hispanic Institute, 1952). Benardete calls the Jews who were exiled in 1492 the “medieval Jews,” and the Marranos who lived in Europe a few more centuries “renaissance Jews.”

innovations in many fields, including the printing press, medicine, weaponry, and banking. Soon after their arrival, the Sephardic Jews began dominating and thereby transforming the Ottoman Jewish culture, sometimes at the expense of the already existing local Jewish traditions. When Rabbi Samuel de Medina of Salonica in the sixteenth century was asked about the right of the majority Sephardim to impose their rites and rituals on non-Sephardim minorities, he appeared to be pleased by saying, “almost everyone has changed to the Sephardic form of prayer, since they are majority in this kingdom, and their prayers are clear and sweet.”⁴⁰ In that time period, the strict borders among the Sephardic congregations blurred and what I called the process of “Sephardization of the Ottoman Jewry” took place as a result of ongoing bargaining among Sephardic, Romaniot, Ashkenazi, and Marrano traditions, as well as larger Ottoman religious and cultural practices. Although the process of “becoming Ottoman” was fully realized in the nineteenth century as Cohen showed,⁴¹ the earlier stage of the process was already well under way in the seventeenth century. Barnai too thinks that the seventeenth century should be considered a formative period, one in which the Jewish heritage transformed with its deep interaction with the larger society. Points of interaction with the Ottoman society shaped the values, norms, and mentality of Jews both as a group and as individuals. Since then, the destiny of Ottoman Jews was linked to the destiny of the empire, and they shared a largely inseparable history up until the twentieth century.

By the second half of the seventeenth century, the Jews began to lose their competitive power vis-à-vis Christians in the Empire. Especially Greeks replaced Jews in go-between roles in diplomatic and commercial matters due to European backing and the superior education they received in European universities.⁴² Familiarity with the world of the Latin West was hard for the Ottoman Jews to maintain after an entire generation had been forced to flee from Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thanks to their education and connection with the Christian West, Greeks—more particularly, Greek noble families known as Phanariots—became better equipped with skills of the marketplace equivalent to those possessed by Jews. In the 1660s, the most important palace interpreter was the Greek Panayoti, who was replaced by another Greek, Mauro Cordato, whose offspring served the empire for centuries. Their familiarity with Latin Christian society made them invaluable to the Ottomans when it came to dealings with the “mysterious” yet formidable “Franks.”⁴³ By the seventeenth century, English and

⁴⁰ Cited in Marc Angel, *Foundations of Sephardic Spirituality* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2006), 25.

⁴¹ Julia Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴² Traian Stoianovich, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant,” *Journal of Economic History* 20:2 (1960): 234–313.

⁴³ William McNeill “Hypotheses concerning Possible Ethnic Role Changes in the Ottoman Empire in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071–1920)*, ed. İnalçık, Halil (Ankara: Meteksan, 1980), 127–129.

French companies were established in the Ottoman port cities, and relations between the Europeans and the Ottomans gained a new momentum. For example, while the French ambassadors had permanent posts in the empire, the Ottoman ambassador, Suleiman Aga, made one of the earliest Ottoman visits to Paris during the time of Louis XIV.⁴⁴ Such developments, along with weakening Jewish ties with Europe, put the Christians in an advantageous position in the competition in the empire.

Contrary to the suggestions of Baer and Minkov, who argued that *dhimmis* had to convert in order to attain high position at the Ottoman palace,⁴⁵ McNeill claims that “conversion [of Greeks] to Islam may have become less frequent, in as much as upwardly mobile individuals no longer had to change their religion to gain access to positions of high prestige employment.”⁴⁶ Until the Greek revolution in the 1820s, Greeks were the dominant actors, serving as diplomats, purveyors, and dragomans for the Ottoman dignitaries. Only after this date did Jews and Armenians begin to replace them at the palace once again.

As a result of this ethnic realignment, the Jews lost their dominant roles in the Ottoman power structure. For example, in the sixteenth century, Jews seem to have been paramount in the tax farm business, but by the mid-seventeenth century, almost no trace of them remained.⁴⁷ Jews were also suffering under heavy taxation, which was paid to both their own communities and the state. In 1653, a new and extra tax, called *yave*, was imposed, and it was collected from all the *dhimmi* migrants during the first ten years after their relocation in their new places. A tax called *rav akcesi*, a form of tax which allowed the Jews to appoint their Chief Rabbis, was paid exclusively by Jews.⁴⁸ As one of the advocates of the Ottoman “declinist” argument, Lewis claims that the conditions of the Jews started to deteriorate in this century because the immigration of Iberian Jewry was coming to a halt, economic opportunities within the empire were diminishing, and competition with Christians was increasing.⁴⁹

These developments created mixed feelings among the Jews toward the Ottomans. For example, while Yeshua Benveniste of Istanbul refers to the sultans as “merciful kings” and maintains that the tax burden “is not as heavy as that which we had to suffer under wicked Edom,”⁵⁰ Hebrew texts from the turn of

⁴⁴ Suleiman Agha was an ambassador to the court of Louis XIV in 1668. In Paris, he set up an attractive tent-house where he stayed more than a month and hosted the Parisian elite, showing them the Ottoman “fashions,” including the introduction of coffee for the first time.

⁴⁵ Marc Baer, “17. Yüzyılda Yahudilerin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’ndaki Nüfuz ve Mevkilerini Yitirmeleri,” *Toplum ve Bilim* 83 (2000): 202–223; Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kise Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670–1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

⁴⁶ McNeill, “Hypotheses concerning Possible Ethnic Role Changes in the Ottoman Empire,” 129.

⁴⁷ Haim Gerber, “Jewish Tax Farmers in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (1986): 154.

⁴⁸ Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, 154.

⁴⁹ Lewis and Braude, *Christians and Jews*, 24.

⁵⁰ Cited in Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, 136.

the seventeenth century are replete with growing bitter feelings toward the Muslims.⁵¹

Do these crises and changes explain the rapid dissemination of the Sabbatean movement in the empire? Moshe Idel contests the common belief, including that of Scholem, that messianism typically arises as a response to such calamities as the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and shows that messiahs often gain great popularity in times of political tranquility.⁵² The Sabbatean affair forces us to revise these opinions, since it flourished both in chaotic and tranquil political milieus.

Ottoman Sultans, European Monarchs, and Sabbatai Sevi

As the Ottoman Empire and Jewish communities had been going through such hardships, young Sabbatai was busy with his religious and mystical studies. During the turbulent reign of the Sultan Ibrahim I (1640–1648), Sabbatai lived in seclusion, experiencing emotional ups and downs to the point that most modern scholars have labeled him manic-depressive.⁵³ Scholem thinks he was suffering from a “profound depression and melancholy alternated with spasms of maniacal exaltation and euphoria, separated by intervals of normality.” Heavily flavored with modern psychological labels and ahistorical nomenclature, this approach disregarded the fact that these “ups and downs” were not uncommon characteristics for mystics. For his followers, those moments of turbulence could be seen as the states of “illumination.” During these periods of “illumination,” he committed some “strange acts (*avodot zarot*)” that were interpreted by his co-religionists as antinomian heresies. Sabbatai surely had an idiosyncratic and eccentric personality, but this did not necessarily make him a “mentally afflicted” person.

In the 1640s, the Ottoman throne was occupied by another eccentric personality: Ibrahim the “mad.” He was the protagonist of one of the most important legitimacy crises in Ottoman history. Murat IV’s (r.1623–1640) untimely death without a son left his brother Ibrahim as the only heir to the throne. Ibrahim spent all his early life in close confinement, in constant fear of being put to death, as four of his elder brothers had been. He was very inexperienced and lacked a capacity to navigate the empire in the stormy seas of the century. Under the auspices of Kösem Sultan (1589–1651), the most powerful regent queen mother in Ottoman history, his “spiritual body,” in the Kantorowiczian sense,⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, 140.

⁵² Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 183.

⁵³ For example, see Avner Falk, “The Messiah and the Qelippoth: On the Mental Illnesses of Sabbatai Sevi,” *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 7 (1982): 5–25.

⁵⁴ In *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), Ernst Kantorowicz points out a profound transformation in the concept of political “theology” over the course of the Middle Ages. The king’s natural body, *corpus naturale*, has physical attributes, suffers, and dies, naturally, as do all humans; but the king’s other body, the spiritual body, *corpus mysticum*, transcends the earthly and serves as a symbol of his office as majesty with the divine right to rule.

ran the “body politic” of the empire, while his “natural body” spent most of his time in an extravagant lifestyle, chasing women and drinking. The future and legitimacy of the dynasty depended on his capacity to produce a male heir. Fearing that the bloodline of rulership in the empire was going to die out, some Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals seriously considered alternative scenarios—including inviting the Crimean dynasty to replace the Ottomans as a new sovereign—to save the empire from a catastrophe.

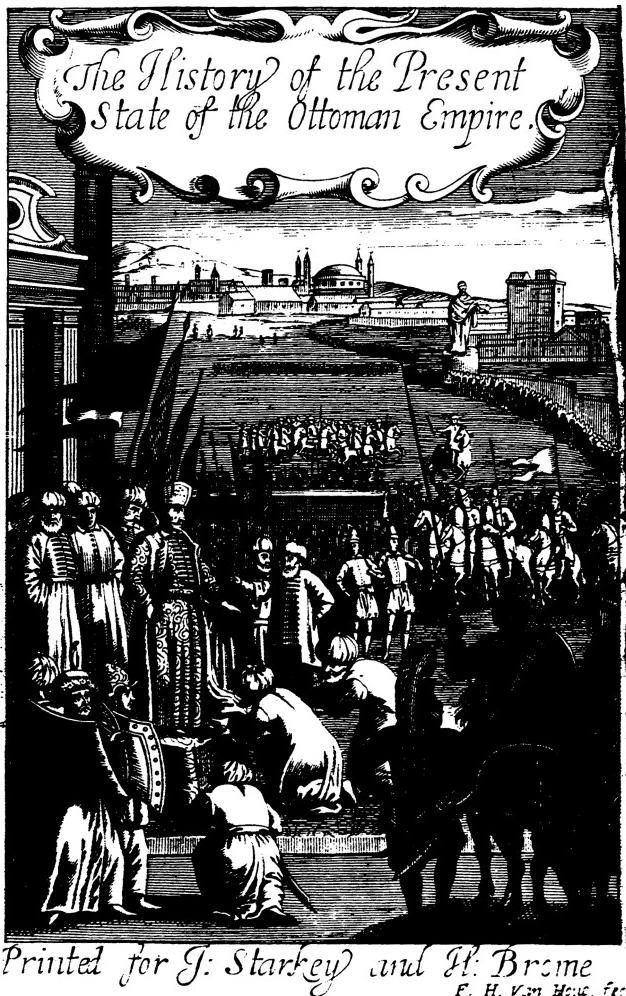
The legitimacy crisis was resolved when three sons were born to Ibrahim in the following years. Perhaps with a nostalgia for the Ottoman heydays, the boys were named after the greatest sultans: Mehmed IV (d.1687), Suleiman II (d.1691), and Ahmet II (d.1695) who would rule the empire, respectively. Ibrahim’s lavish lifestyle cost him his own life. The imposition of heavy taxes, not for the prosecution of the war but for the satisfaction of his eccentric whims, led to increasing discontent in the empire. Ibrahim was deposed and put in confinement, and then strangled at the palace, while his eight-year-old son Mehmet IV (Figure 1.3),⁵⁵ who was to be the most important Ottoman actor in the Sabbatean affair, was placed on the throne by an alliance of Janissaries and *ulemas*.

As the struggle over succession continued at the palace, the new geopolitical and strategic development brought the Ottomans to the brink of war with Venice. The conflict broke out in 1645 and lasted almost a quarter of a century. Although the final victory went to the Ottomans, it was a most costly and protracted war. During the conflict, the Mediterranean and Aegean sea routes to the Dardanelles and Istanbul were blocked for years. And that affected all the traffic to and from the Ottoman Empire, including Sevi’s visitors in 1666. The war also contributed to the emergence of Izmir, Sabbatai’s hometown, as a new international port, an alternative to Istanbul in the mid-century.

A massacre in neighboring Poland in 1648 connected the stories of Sabbatai, the Ottoman Empire, and Poland. In 1648, the Ukrainian officer Bogdan Chmielnicki (1594–1657), with the support of the Tatar Khan of Crimea, incited the local peasants to fight against their Polish overlords and brutally killed thousands of people, including Jews. On the assumption that the Jews were allied with the Polish nobility and served them as purveyors, tax collectors, and financial advisors, the Cossacks massacred them. It is estimated that 100,000–200,000 Jews were killed during the revolt in 1648–1649. This event introduced the Cossack term “pogrom” into our vocabulary.

The long-term tensions between the Cossacks and the Polish king and nobility were of a religious nature. Polish magnates, similar to the Habsburg rulers, attempted to establish Roman Catholicism as the dominant religious faith in Poland, though in the Ukrainian territories, peasants were generally Orthodox. An enforced “union” between the two churches in 1596 led to considerable friction and in the long run constituted one of the major reasons for the Cossack uprising in 1648. The leader of the rebellion, Chmielnicki, at

⁵⁵ Paul Rycaut, *History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Printed for J. Starkey, 1680), 6.



*Printed for J: Starkey and H: Brome
F. H. Van Houe, fec.*

FIGURE 1.3 An imaginary scene of Mehmet IV accepting envoys, 1670s. Frontispiece of Paul Rycaut, *History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Printed for J. Starkey, 1675).

first attempted to form an alliance with Tatars and the Ottoman sultan, since both of them were already in conflict with Poland. He received considerable support from the Crimeans and then the Ottomans, but this support did not continue for long.⁵⁶

The news about the pogroms, which was disseminated by those who fled from the Polish commonwealth, contributed tremendously to the doomsday

⁵⁶ In 1653, Bogdan Chmielnicki accepted the overlordship of Muscovy so that in a battle fought in 1655, a Polish-Tatar and Russo-Cossack alliance confronted one another.

scenarios among the pessimistic and messianic Jewish circles. To many scholars, the Chmielnicki massacre was one of the most important factors, if not the central one, leading to the messianic expectations among the Eurasian Jewish communities.⁵⁷

When the news from the Chmielnicki massacres reached Izmir in the 1648s, Sevi was still enrapt in his own world, studying the Kabbalistic texts about the nature of the Jewish messiah.⁵⁸ We do not know for sure whether he was influenced by this terrible news that put the Jewish world in such a state of shock, but possibly for the first time in 1648, Sabbatai proclaimed himself the long-awaited messiah and uttered in public the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable name of God, which Jews had been forbidden to pronounce since the destruction of the Second Temple. As contemporary Armenian historian Arakel (d. 1670) confirms, he said “I am that savior and I have come to save Israel.”⁵⁹

Sabbatai’s “unorthodox” views and “strange actions” made the orthodox Jews and rabbis, including his teachers very upset, and he became *persona non grata* in Izmir. In these years he began to speak of the “God of his faith” with whom he felt a particularly intimate relation.⁶⁰ Back then, perhaps no one could imagine that this date was a turning point in the emergence of the Sabbatean movement.

By then, he had married twice but had divorced since the marriages were not consummated. As displeasure with him was growing in his town, Sabbatai decided to leave and visit other Jewish communities in the early 1650s. That was the beginning of his endless travels as a “wandering Jew” until his death. He first sailed to the hometown of his father in Morea during the war between the Ottomans and Venetians in the Aegean Sea. Then, he traveled through Greece and Anatolia, staying for a long time in Salonica and Istanbul where he made several friends in Jewish and Sufi circles. His stay in Salonica became a landmark event for the Dönme tradition, since the Dönme believed (and still do) that Sabbatai committed “strange acts,” including marrying himself to a Torah scroll and the Shekhina, divine presence of God. According to this tradition, Shekhina was embodied in Sevi’s persona in Salonica, and that event made Salonica a holier place than Jerusalem.⁶¹ After few years in Salonica, Sabbatai’s “intolerable” and “strange” activities created displeasure among the Jewish authorities, and he was expelled from the city in 1658. Sabbatai went to Istanbul, hoping to find a more “tolerant” Jewish audience. He stayed there for nine months and befriended famous kabbalists such as David Habillo (d. 1661)

⁵⁷ Jacob Barnai, “The Outbreak of Sabbateanism—The Eastern European Factor,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 171–183.

⁵⁸ Moshe Idel, “Saturn and Sabbati Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism,” in *Toward the Millennium*, ed. P. Shafer and M. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 178.

⁵⁹ Arakel of Tabriz, *Book of History*, ed. G. Bournoutain, (Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda, 2010), 548.

⁶⁰ Gershom Scholem, “Shabbetai Zevi,” *JUDAICA*, online edition.

⁶¹ Communicated to me by a contemporary Dönme.

and Muslim mystics and possibly Niyazi el-Misri.⁶² His connections to Sufis continued when he visited the city years later. While in Istanbul, he declared that he had abolished certain commandments and celebrated the three Jewish festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot all in one week. He legitimized his acts by stating that it was God “who permits that which is forbidden.” Such antinomian behaviors created a new wave of hostility toward him, and once again he was expelled, leaving Istanbul by the end of 1658.

After almost a decade in exile, Sabbatai was now a famous middle-aged man. He decided to go back to his hometown. This time, however, possibly because of his fear of yet another expulsion, he opted for a more secluded lifestyle. It is likely that his family was instrumental in his seclusion and in preventing him from engaging in “scandalous” activities in Izmir. Legend has it that, he continued to meet his close friends and sympathizers in the top floor of his house. When news of the Great Fire of 1660 that consumed the oldest and largest Jewish neighborhood in Istanbul reached Izmir, Sabbatai must have thought that it was the portent of the messianic age.

In 1662, Sabbatai set sail to Jerusalem via Rhodes and Cairo. By the end of 1662 he arrived at Jerusalem and stayed there for about a year. Jerusalem in the seventeenth century was a small and poor city, as were its Jewish communities.⁶³ Pilgrims in different centuries had attempted to settle in Jerusalem but eventually abandoned the attempt because life there was so difficult. Jewish, Christian, and even Muslim communities in the city were dependent on outside charities.

Sabbatai’s father died about this time (his mother even earlier). Thanks to his deep Jewish learning and knowledge about other Jewish communities in the empire, he became a respected figure in Jerusalem. In the fall of 1663, as an emissary of the Jerusalem Jews, he went to Cairo to raise funds for the Jews in Jerusalem who were living in poverty. Between 1663 and 1665, he traveled several times between the two cities, staying mostly in Cairo. There he became a protégé in the mystical circle of Raphael Joseph Çelebi, the head of Egyptian Jewry and the Sarrafbaşı, director of the Ottoman treasury of Egypt, who had developed a deep interest in Jewish mysticism and messianism.⁶⁴ Although there is no solid evidence, it is highly likely that Sabbatai also met the famous Jewish historian of the time, Joseph Sambari, who was one of the attendants in Çelebi’s palace.⁶⁵

⁶² Heinrich Graetz, “Überbleibsel der Sabbatianischen Sekte in Saloniki,” *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Gissenschaft des Judenthums* (1884), 60; Paul Fenton, “Shabbatay Sebi and His Muslim Contemporary Muhammed an-Niyazi,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. David Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 81–88.

⁶³ Dror Zeevi, *An Ottoman Century: The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

⁶⁴ Jane Hathaway, “The Grand Vizier and the False Messiah: The Sabbatai Sevi Controversy and the Ottoman Reform in Egypt,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117: 4 (1997): 665–671.

⁶⁵ Martin Jacob thinks that the two men met, and Sambari was a Sabbatean believer. Jacob, “An Ex-Sabbatean’s Remorse? Sambari’s Polemics against Islam,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97: 3 (2007): 347–378.

In Cairo, Sabbatai married Sarah, an Ashkenazi woman of uncertain background, on March 31, 1664. His two previous unconsummated marriages that had ended in divorce led to rumors that he was impotent. His marriage to Sarah ended these rumors, as he had two children with her. Sarah, according to Sabbatai, was an orphan of the 1648 Chmielnicki massacres and raised by a Polish nobleman. After spending some years in a convent in Amsterdam, she moved to Livorno, Italy. In dreams, she saw that she was destined to marry the messiah. Upon hearing news about Sabbatai, she came to Cairo to meet him. Contrasted with Sabbatai's account, common rumor claimed that Sarah was a woman of easy virtue, even a harlot. Sabbatai's believers likened this marriage to that of prophet Hosea who had also married a prostitute. A certain sexual licentiousness entered the movement with the marriage of Sabbatai and Sarah, though engaging in forbidden acts had been part of Sabbatean theology from the beginning, based on the Talmudic teaching that "the Messianic Age will come when all men are righteous or all men are sinners." Van der Haven insightfully suggests that Sarah's role was not only important but also indispensable to the eventual domination of the antinomian element in the Sabbatean movement.⁶⁶

In 1665, while he was returning from Cairo to Jerusalem, Sabbatai met a young man from Gaza whose name was Nathan. It was a fateful moment in the course of the Sabbatean movement. Before examining the nature of the relationship between the two men, we turn our attention once again to the larger Ottoman context. In the 1660s, although religiously still chaotic, the empire was in relative peace so that Sabbatai, or anyone for that matter, could travel from one city to another without interference of bandits. How did the Ottomans secure this political stability after decades of chaos in the empire?

Grand Viziers, the Ottoman Puritans, and Sabbatai Sevi

The years between 1656 and 1702 in Ottoman history is popularly known as the Köprülü Period. This was a significant time for the empire for two reasons: the reassertion of Ottoman power in domestic and international arenas, and the rise of state-sponsored Islamic orthodoxy. These developments were important for the Ottoman Jews and the Sabbatean movement in many ways.

During this period, the institution of the grand viziership was strengthened, and as Abou-El-Haj asserts, the power and position of the sultan had become marginal and symbolic.⁶⁷ Since the second half of the sixteenth century when political and military leadership was delegated to the grand viziers, the sultans had ceased to participate in person in the meetings of

⁶⁶ Alexander van der Haven, *From Lowly Metaphor to Divine Flesh: Sarah the Askenazi, Sabbatai Tsevis' Messianic Queen and the Sabbataian Movement* (Amsterdam: Menasseh ben Israel Institute, 2012).

⁶⁷ Rifat Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 38, 44.

the palace Divan (the Ottoman imperial council), but occasionally monitored them behind a screen. In 1657, when Grand Vizier Köprülü Mehmet Pasha (1578–1661) began having separate Divan meetings in his own lodge, the role of the sultans became even more minimal in day-to-day state affairs. In the vocabulary of Kantorowicz, the “spiritual body” of the Ottoman sultan came to matter most in the early modern times.

In 1656, at his request, Köprülü Mehmet was given unprecedented authority, under the patronage of Hatice Turhan Sultan, who was the queen mother of Mehmet IV. This was perhaps the first effective separation of the ruler and the state apparatus in the empire. A fiercely conservative disciplinarian, Köprülü quickly reestablished central authority and the empire’s military success. His first target was the puritanical Kadızadelis, who, since the time of Murat IV, had been causing sectarian troubles in Istanbul. As discussed later, Köprülü banished their leaders to Cyprus and halted the Kadizadeli influence until the time of Vani Efendi (1661–1687). Then he directed his energy toward external enemies. The Dardanelles and Constantinople had been under siege by the Venetians for some time. The Venetian victory over the Ottomans in 1656 was considered a second Lepanto and was a major blow to Ottoman confidence. In 1657, Köprülü broke the Venetian blockade, recaptured the islands of Tenedos and Limni, and made secure the sea-supply routes to the Ottoman Army, which continued to impose a siege on Crete.⁶⁸ His next big mission was to bring order to Anatolia and to crush all those who had joined the Celali revolts.⁶⁹ Similar to Kuyucu Murat, Köprülü Mehmet massacred thousands of rebels and bandits in the name of establishing order in Anatolia.

It is important to note that Sabbatai traveled through the land route to Izmir, Aleppo, Jerusalem, and Cairo only after 1658; before this time he understandably preferred to use sea routes, and traveled mostly in the Balkans. The Jewish legal literature, *responsa*, contains hundreds of cases testifying to the robbery or murder of Jewish merchants and peddlers before the Köprülü period.⁷⁰ When Köprülü Mehmet died in 1661, his son Fazıl Ahmet (1635–1676), who would be one of the key actors in the Sabbatean affair, replaced him. Fazıl Ahmet belonged to both the military and *ulema* circles. After having several posts in *madrasas* and provincial governments, he began his long and successful tenure as grand vizier. Under his leadership the empire was expanded to include more territory than ever before, including the captured strongholds of Khotin and Kamianets-Podilskyi and the territory of Podolia in Poland and southern Ukraine. The shifting borders and changing alliances between the Ottoman Empire and the Polish Commonwealth allowed Muslim, Christians, and Jews on the borders to interact and co-exist. Similarly, these borders had

⁶⁸ Mehmet Halife, *Tarih-i Gilmani*, ed. Kamil, Su (Ankara: Kultur Bakanlığı, 1986), 44.

⁶⁹ Mustafa Naima, *Tarih-i Naima* (İstanbul: n.p., 1864–1866), VI: 415–416.

⁷⁰ E. Eshkenazy, “Jewish Documents about Jews Murdered and Robbed on the Balkan Peninsula during the XVIth and the XVIIth Centuries,” *Annual* 5 (1970): 73–102.

been the point of interaction between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi worlds, between the Sabbatean and Hassidic worlds, and between the Ottoman and European worlds. Baal Shem Tov, the legendary founder of Hassidism, was born in 1699 in an Ottoman town in Podolia, which was later taken over by Poland.⁷¹

During Fazil Ahmet's tenure, state-sponsored Kadizadelis gained a new momentum.⁷² The Kadizadelis, who were active mainly in Istanbul in three successive waves between the 1630s and 1700s, were Sharia-minded people similar to other seventeenth-century English, Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and Mughal puritans who wanted to purge the “blameworthy innovations” in society and bring back an “uncontaminated” version of religion. They attributed the empire’s military defeat abroad and economic difficulties at home to the affiliation and patronage of members of the Ottoman elite with Sufi orders.⁷³ They also expressed unease about various practices in which the state was directly involved, such as endorsing cash *waqfs* (pious charity foundations), collecting customs on the sale of wine, and employing *dhimmis* in the state services. They were particularly unhappy with ecstatic mystical beliefs and practices such as *zikr* (invoking names of God in a repetitive manner in prayer and meditation), music, dance, pilgrimage to tombs of saints, and the use of coffee, tobacco, and opium.

The connection between the rise of the Kadizadelis and its possible impact on the Sabbatean movement has been already pointed out by Madeline Zilfi, Derin Terzioğlu, Marc Baer, and Karen Barkey. The same social and political conditions gave rise to both the Kadizadelis conservative movement and the Jewish messianic movement.⁷⁴ As shown by these scholars, the confrontation between the Kadizadelis reformists and the Sufis manifested itself in three stages. The first stage came with the reign of Murat IV (1623–1640), when the *selefî* reformists, under the leadership of Kadızade Mehmet (d.1635), a disciple of puritan Birgivi Mehmet Efendi (d.1573), began to make their voices heard and to rival the influence of Sufi sheikhs in palace circles. To Kadizadelis, true Muslims and their rulers had a duty to promote the Quranic command of “Emr bi'l-ma'ruf nehy-i ani'l-munker,” that is, “commanding good, and prohibiting evil.” This principle became so pervasive in this century that even Sabbatai adopted the phrase after his conversion in order to admonish the Jews (see Chapter 2). To one of the “liberal” intellectuals of the time, Katip

⁷¹ The cultural and social impact of the shifting borders is yet to be studied. On the musical interaction, for example, there was a significant amount of transfer from the Balkan world to the Ashkenazi world, or from the Sufi world to the Hassidic world. For example, “Kasap Havasi,” the famous melody and song of the Balkans, becomes “Kasapiko” in Eastern European Hassidic culture.

⁷² For the Kadizadelis affair, see Madeline Zilfi, “The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in 17th Century Istanbul,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 4 (1986): 251–271.

⁷³ Mark Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 100.

⁷⁴ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 183.

Çelebi (1609–1657), the Kadızadeli attitude was “intolerant,” “unwise,” “unacceptable,” and, even worse, “potentially tyrannical.”⁷⁵ The second stage of the movement (1648–1656) was the turbulent first eight years of the reign of Mehmet IV, when the Kadızadelis expanded their base of support and became more aggressive in their attacks against the Sufis. This stage was brought to an end by Köprülü Mehmet. In the third stage (1661–1703), the Kadızadelis found its most influential advocate ever in the person of Vani Mehmet Efendi (d. 1685), who was originally not from Istanbul but from an eastern town, Van. Vani Efendi was invited to Istanbul by Fazıl Ahmet, who had befriended him while Ahmet was the governor of Erzurum.

Shortly after he was admitted to the palace, Vani Efendi gained the trust of the sultan and the queen mother.⁷⁶ What distinguished him from the earlier reformists is not only that his reform agenda was adopted by the ruling elite but also that his position against “non-orthodox” entities, including Enthusiastic Sufis, heretics, non-Muslims, and even established *ulemas*, was supported by them. Thanks to his efforts, not only was the imperial prohibition renewed against smoking and coffeehouses but also against the use of music and dance in Sufi ceremonies, and some Sufi lodges were demolished by imperial order. Jewish and Christian properties were confiscated, churches destroyed, taverns razed, and wine traffic banned.

Vani’s enthusiasm for educating the public in general and new Muslims in particular was astonishing. His zeal reached such a degree that he gained permission from the sultan to establish a new school in the garden of the palace where he could disseminate his version of Islam.⁷⁷ The basic textbooks of his school were the *Commentary* of Kadi Beydavi, whose approach to the Quran was in keeping with the Kadızadeli mood of the time; *Kisas-i Enbiya* (Stories of Prophets); and *Siyer-i Nebi* (Life of the Prophet Muhammad). The sultan himself frequented some of the classes in Vani’s school and also attended his Friday sermons. For example, on June 12, 1667, on the eve of a military expedition to the Balkans, Vani Efendi gave a fiery speech at the camp to motivate the army before the mission. It was reported that everyone including the sultan was left in tears.⁷⁸

The 1660s was a time of natural disasters in the empire. Fires, earthquakes, and plagues hit different areas, and Vani was able to incorporate these calamities into his discourses.⁷⁹ Visiting the empire in those years, Dr. Covel affirms Vani’s authority and impact on Ottoman policymaking.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Katip Çelebi, *Balance of the Truth*, trans. G. Lewis (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), 133.

⁷⁶ Abdurrahman Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname* (Süleymaniye Library, Hafid Efendi 250), 8ob.

⁷⁷ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 100a.

⁷⁸ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 82b.

⁷⁹ Joseph Hammer, *Ottoman Devleti Tarihi*, trans. Mehmet Ata (Ankara: TTK, 1947), 172.

⁸⁰ “Dr. Covel’s Diary, 1670–9,” in *Early Voyages and Travels in Asia* (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1880), 269.

The third period of the Kadizadelī movement was also a time when “heretics” and figures connected with movements considered non-orthodox were chased down, exiled, and persecuted. The Sabbatean movement, being one of the nonconformist Enthusiastic movements, was no exception in this regard. What is different in the Sabbatean case, however, as we see in the next chapters, is that the conversion of Sabbatai fit very well into the Kadizadelī reform agenda, which aimed to convert more people to Islam. The Kadizadelis lost their momentum at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the last significant Kadizadelī, Sheikhlislam Feyzullah Efendi, who was Vani Efendi’s disciple and son-in-law, was strangled after the Edirne rebellion in 1703. Although it was an ephemeral aberration, the Kadizadelī period was an important “episode in a history of Ottoman Sunnitization.”⁸¹

Natural Calamities, Environmental Crises and the Sabbatean Movement

Among the natural calamities that struck the Ottoman Jews in the seventeenth century, the 1660 fire, rightly called Ihrak-ı Kebir or “Great Fire” in Istanbul, was perhaps the most disastrous. Possibly bigger than the Great Fire of London in 1666—which was considered a sign of the end of days by English millenarians⁸²—the Istanbul fire started on the premises of a wood seller on 24 July 1660 in Eminönü and spread rapidly with the help of a powerful wind, very quickly devouring almost two-thirds of the wooden buildings within the city walls and leaving thousands of Jews, Christians, and Muslims homeless. In forty-nine hours, many houses of worship and 280,000 homes were burned down;⁸³ 40,000 people perished in the flames.⁸⁴ The epicenter of the disaster was a densely populated, centuries-old Jewish town. Of an estimated forty synagogues in the city, at least seven were lost in the fire.⁸⁵ The area had been serving as an international business hub and port since Byzantine times, when it was called Porta Hebraica, the Jewish Gate—or Cifut Kapusu in Ottoman times.⁸⁶ By the end of the sixteenth century, almost 60 percent of the Istanbul Jews and almost all of the Romaniots resided in the area and its vicinity.⁸⁷

After the fire, following an imperial decree, all the Jews were forced to sell their properties within the city walls on the pain of death and move out to

⁸¹ Derin Terzioglu, “Sufis in the Age of State Building and Confessionalization,” in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2011), 86–103.

⁸² The London Fire started on September 2 and stopped on September 5, 1666, destroying almost 80 percent of the city within the old walls.

⁸³ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 46a.

⁸⁴ Hammer, *Osmancı Devleti Tarihi*, 76.

⁸⁵ Uriel Heyd, “The Jewish Communities of Istanbul in the 17th Century,” *Oriens* (1951): 313.

⁸⁶ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, ed. Orhan Şaik Gökyay (Istanbul: YKY, 1996), I: 124.

⁸⁷ Stephane Yerasimos, “La Communauté Juive de Istanbul,” *Turcica* 27 (1995): 101–102.

such other neighborhoods as Balat, Hasköy, and Ortaköy, all of which were located outside the city walls. One of the most important sources of Jewish wealth, generated by the custom offices in this area, was mostly transferred to the Muslims. The decision was justified by rising anti-Jewish sentiment among Ottoman intellectuals and bureaucrats. These events changed the structure of the Ottoman Jewish community in such a way that it marked the end of the Romaniot tradition and contributed greatly to the already deteriorating conditions of the Jewish communities in the empire.

Why did the Ottoman royals, bureaucrats, and intellectuals change their traditional “positive” attitudes toward the Jews in these years? Was it a widespread and long-term phenomenon or was it an ephemeral aberration? Many have linked the issue to the rise of the Kadızadeli movement and deliberate Ottoman attempts in “islamization of the space.”⁸⁸ For example, Marc Baer suggests that the fire served as an opportunity for regent queen mother, Hatice Turhan, Fazil Ahmed Pasha, and Vani Efendi to promote islamization to satisfy their different political and religious interests.⁸⁹

There is no doubt that the fire and ban on resettlement within the city walls detrimentally impacted the Ottoman Jewish communities, and their growing pessimism fed into the Sabbatean movement. However, linking the issue to the Kadızadeli influence requires some chronological reconsideration. By the time the fire broke out in 1660, the Kadızadeli agenda had been effectively repressed by Köprülü Mehmet. Just a year and half after the fire this agenda had become an integral part of the state ideology, when Fazil Ahmet became the grand vizier and introduced Vani Efendi to the palace. Therefore, the Kadızadeli agenda could not be the driving force behind the sultanic decree requiring the removal of the Jews from the “downtown” area.

In trying to explain the rationale behind the Jewish banishment, a contemporary Ottoman historian, Silahtar Mehmet, reports that in Eminönü there was an incomplete mosque, whose construction was originally begun in 1597 under the auspices of Safiye Sultan (d.1605), mother of Sultan Mehmet III (d.1603). It was left incomplete because of the death of Mehmet III and the removal of the queen mother from the palace.⁹⁰ In time, Jewish houses were built over the site. Writing just few years after the fire, Silahdar relates that both the grand vizier and the queen mother were petitioned by certain people to complete the project.⁹¹

Another contemporary source relates that the grand vizier first urged the queen mother to repair the Cerrah Mehmet Pasha Mosque and then, on the advice of the head architect, Mustafa Efendi, recommended that she complete

⁸⁸ Lucienne Thys-Senocak, “The Yeni Valide Mosque Complex at Eminönü,” *Muqarnas* 15 (1998): 58–70; and Marc Baer, “The Great Fire of 1660.”

⁸⁹ Baer, “The Great Fire of 1660.”

⁹⁰ Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*, 187–256.

⁹¹ Silahdar Mehmet, *Silahtar Tarihi* (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1928), I: 218.

the mentioned mosque instead.⁹² The queen mother, who had already undertaken extensive engineering projects, as a self-professed protector and sustainer of the empire, chose to complete the unfinished mosque, desiring to imprint her name on yet another imperial site.⁹³ Unlike the previous project, however, she envisioned a larger building complex and public space, comprising a mosque, a market, pavilion, tomb, school, fountain and a timing room (*muvakkithane*).

Hatice Turhan, taking advantage of the 1660 fire, convinced the Sultan to issue an imperial edict, requiring the Jews to sell their properties and leave the mosque area and all the Jewish neighborhoods within the city walls. As Zachariadou states, natural calamities could be a disaster for one people and an opportunity for others.⁹⁴ An Armenian author, Eremya Kömürcüyan, who himself was a victim of the fire, relates that the Jews were exiled to Hasköy after the fire, and in return they were given houses and exempted from taxes for a period of time. Kömürcüyan also relates that some of the Jewish *waqfs* remained in the mosque area and were rented out to the Ottomans.⁹⁵

Although they tried many tactics, including bribing the grand vizier, the Jews could not undo the sultanic edict. There were few influential Jews, and none could stop Hatice Turhan's plan to evacuate the Jews from the heartland of the city. The shocking news about the fire and Jewish exile reached other Jewish communities, including those of Izmir, Salonica, and Jerusalem, alerting them to the worsening conditions of the Jews in the empire. While visiting Istanbul in the early 1660s, Sabbatai must have witnessed the perils of the Istanbul Jews, shared their sufferings, and transmitted their news to other Jewish communities in Izmir, Cairo, and Jerusalem.

In describing the fire, Evliya Çelebi, who was a notorious anti-Jew, tells us that "when there was a great fire in Istanbul the filthy homes of Jews residing within Jew's Gate were destroyed and burned in the flames" and "By the command of God, all Jewish homes were burned and all Jews were banished from that area."⁹⁶ One could see even stronger anti-Jewish sentiment in the endowment deed of the mosque complex that was signed by Fazıl Ahmet.⁹⁷ There the fire was portrayed as divine punishment for the "enemies of Islam," the Jews. Since this deed was penned sometime after the construction of the mosque in 1665, one could see the traces of the Kadızadeli mindset, already part of the power relations at the palace by that time. The new mosque was opened after a major ceremony on 30 October 1665, when the Sabbatean

⁹² *Risale-i Kurd Hatib* (Topkapi Sarayı Eski Hazine 1400, fol. 20a–21a).

⁹³ For her other architectural projects, see Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Zachariadou, "Natural Disasters: Moments of Opportunity," in *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Zachariadou et al. (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1999), 7–14.

⁹⁵ Eremya Kömürcüyan, *Istanbul Tarihi: XVII. Asırda İstanbul*, ed. Kevork Pamukçian (İstanbul: Eren 1988), 164.

⁹⁶ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, I: 125, 176.

⁹⁷ Cited in Baer, "The Great Fire of 1660."

movement was gaining momentum. Vani Efendi gave the first Friday sermon on that day. Writing almost a decade after the fire, Yosef Sambari, who was one of the famous Ottoman Jewish chroniclers, mentions the devastating effect of the fire on Istanbul Jews, but interestingly mentions nothing about the anti-Jewish sentiment at the time.⁹⁸

In addition to these individual natural disasters, some historians rightly suggest that rapid dissemination of the Sabbatean movement owes its success in part to the changes in religion and politics resulting from the General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century, which could be linked to the Little Ice Age.⁹⁹ The Little Ice Age was a period of global cooling that occurred after a warmer era known as the Medieval Warm Period and lasted from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ During that period, the temperature dropped 2–4 degrees centigrade; cold and long winters brought bad harvests, pestilence, plagues, famine, poverty, starvation, and death for millions. Between 1645 and 1715, however, there was another 2–3 degree drop in temperature that caused bitterly cold winters and more severe hardships in the lives of the people in the Northern Hemisphere. During these years, excessive rain and storms made it impossible to grow crops; canals and rivers in England and the Netherlands, as well as the Golden Horn and Bosphorus, were frequently frozen.¹⁰¹ It is not a coincidence that the Ottomans established a new tax, called the “Fur Tax,” since wearing fur clothes dramatically increased in the 1640s and 1650s.

The general crisis, perhaps for the first time, was pointed out by Voltaire, philosopher and writer of the French Enlightenment. After Voltaire, many European observers made reference to either a European or a global crisis in the seventeenth century. The term “the general crisis” was coined in the 1950s, and since its inception, it has been employed in economic and political areas or to describe all sectors of life.¹⁰² Widespread acknowledgment of the protracted cold weather demonstrates that no national or religious histories in that period could be seen in isolation. It also suggests that puritanical and enthusiastic religious movements emerged as a reaction or solution to the economic and political crises of the century.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Joseph Sambari, *Divre Yosef* (Jerusalem: Mekhon ben-Tsevi, 1984), 86.

⁹⁹ For a summary of this creative and yet inconclusive debate, see Geoffrey Parker and Lesley Smith, eds., *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1997); and Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

¹⁰⁰ Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300–1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

¹⁰¹ For the impact of the Ice Age on the Ottoman Empire, see Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁰² Theodore Rabb replaces the word “crisis” with the words “struggle for stability,” since crisis by definition must be short-lived. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁰³ For the definitions of Enthusiasts, see Michael Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), introduction.

Although it is difficult to establish a causal connection, there is a striking correlation between the environmental crisis and the material context which led to rising puritanical, Enthusiastic, and messianic movements, including the Sabbatean movement in the early modern period.¹⁰⁴

Sabbatai Sevi and Nathan of Gaza: The Beginnings of a Messianic Movement

In the spring of 1665, Sabbatai was still visiting various Jewish communities in Egypt and Palestine. In April, when he was returning from Cairo to Jerusalem, he stopped at Gaza, where he met Nathan, a twenty-one year old Kabbalist. At a slow pace, it would have taken him some fifteen to twenty days to travel from Cairo to Gaza and Jerusalem. Nathan was known as the “physician of the soul” in Jerusalem and Gaza due to his mystical erudition, steeped especially in Lurianic tradition. He had already heard about Sabbatai when he was studying under Jacob Hagiz, the famous kabbalist in Jerusalem, and he even claimed that he had had visions about Sabbatai’s messiahship. Sabbatai and Nathan, now friends, spent about three months together, during which they traveled to Jerusalem and Hebron Jewish communities several times. By mid-May, they were back in Gaza where Sabbatai began preaching repentance to the Jews and obedience to himself, for the coming of the messiah was at hand. Fueled by Nathan’s enthusiastic activities, a small community of messianic believers was in the making in Palestine.

Rabbi Jacob Najara, grandson of the celebrated poet, Israel Najara; Samuel Primo; Mattathias Bloch; Israel Benjamin; and Moses Galante were some of the sympathizers of Sabbatai. By the time Sabbatai realized that he had a small group of strong supporters, he proclaimed himself the long-awaited messiah on the 17th of Sivan (May 31, 1665). Although Scholem and many other scholars insisted that Nathan was the one who convinced Sabbatai to make his public declaration of messiahship, this seems unlikely, simply because a twenty-one-year-old man (to Coenen, he was nineteen years old)¹⁰⁵, though very enthusiastic, could not easily convince a thirty-nine-year-old intelligent, learned, and experienced man within such a short period of time that he was indeed the messiah. A contemporary Armenian historian, Arakel, confirms

¹⁰⁴ Cengiz Sisman, “Global Crisis, Puritanism and Prophecy: Some Observations on the Apocalyptic Relationship between Christian Salvation, Jewish Conversion and Turkish Doom in the Early Modern World and Its Impact on the Sabbatean Movement,” in *Transcending the Diaspora: Studies on Sabbateans*, ed. Cengiz Sisman (Istanbul: Libra, 2016). Forthcoming.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Coenen, *Tsipiyyot shav shel ha-Yehudim: kefi she-hitgalu bi-demuto shel Shabtai Tsevi* [Hebrew], trans. from Dutch by Asher Lagavir (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur, 1998), 140.

that Sabbatai “became well-read and a better debater” in time.¹⁰⁶ Describing Sabbatai’s messianic activities in the Holy Land, Rycaut writes:

In Jerusalem, he abolished the fast of Tamuz, and meeting there with a certain Jew called Nathan, a proper instrument to promote his design, he communicated to him his conditions, his course of life, and intentions to declare himself the Messiah of the World, so long expected and desired by the Jews. This design took wonderfully with Nathan; and because it was thought necessary, according to Scripture and ancient Prophecies, that Elias was to precede the messiah, as St. John Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, Nathan thought no man so proper to act the part of the Prophet as himself.¹⁰⁷

Here, Sabbatai was portrayed not as a passive recipient but rather as an active agent of his actions, which I find closer to reality. In other words, Sabbatai must have convinced and used Nathan as an “instrument,” not the other way around. This can be corroborated by the tone of Nathan’s letters, sent to Jewish communities all over the world. In those letters, Nathan continually made references to the “orders” and “instructions” and “commands” of Sabbatai to him.¹⁰⁸ The reason Scholem insisted that Nathan was the mastermind for the messianic proclamation seems to be a strategic move on his part to prepare the way for his famous argument about the Lurianic background of the Sabbatean movement. Or, as Lowy suggests, it was because of Scholem’s excessive fascination with Nathan whom he perceived as an ancestor of his own religious anarchism.¹⁰⁹ As discussed in the third chapter, Sabbatai had not studied Lurianism in his earlier life and knew next to nothing about the Lurianic Kabbala. Of course, it is perfectly plausible that Nathan could have conceptualized Sevi’s mission as being in accord with the Lurianic world, a world that he was most familiar with. Later, Nathan developed and disseminated his own version of Sabbateanism both in the early phase of the movement and in the later stages when the movement turned into a sectarian entity. In later years, unhappy with the Nathanian Sabbateanism, Sabbatai strongly admonished Nathan in a letter for distorting his message and “betraying a great and awesome ban”—namely, for betraying his oath and revealing to others the mystery of the Godhead, and “stole and fed others with him.”¹¹⁰

While he was in Jerusalem, despite the Muslim prohibition that forbade *dhimmis* to ride a horse in the city or wear certain colors, such as white and green, Sabbatai the messiah mounted a horse, draped in green, and made a

¹⁰⁶ Arakel, *Book of History*, 548.

¹⁰⁷ Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 202.

¹⁰⁸ For Nathan’s other letters, Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 200–219.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Lowy, “The Modern Intellectual and His Heretical Ancestor: Gershon Scholem and Nathan of Gaza,” *Diogenes* (June 2000): 102–106.

¹¹⁰ Abraham Amarillo, “Sabbatean Documents from the Saul Amarillo Collection” [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 5 (1961): 266–268. For a discussion of the letter, see Yahuda Liebes, “Sabbatai Zevi’s Religious Faith,” in his *Studies in Jewish Myth*, 110–111.

triumphal entry into Jerusalem after having circumambulated it seven times in kingly fashion. There, he gathered a group of followers and assigned them symbolic posts of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, proclaiming them to be the representatives and kings of these tribes. Henceforward, his followers called him Amirah, an acronym of “Adoneinu Malkenu yuram hodo” (our Lord and King, may his majesty be exalted) and an allusion to the Arabic term *amir*, or prince. Not only admirers of but also dissenters against Sabbatai emerged in Jerusalem. For example, a certain physician of Portuguese origin, steeped in the traditional knowledge of holy books, derided Sabbatai in public and challenged the veracity of his claims; he even attempted to lodge a petition with the Ottoman judge, *kadi*.¹¹¹ Some of the important rabbis of Jerusalem, including Abraham Amigo; Jacob Hagiz, Nathan’s teacher; Samuel Garmison (Germizan); and the kabbalist Jacob Zemah were Sabbatai’s severe opponents. The rabbis wanted to expel him from the city, and for that they used either their own capacities or lodged complaints with the Ottoman authorities in June 1665.

Who were the Ottoman authorities in Jerusalem, and what would have been their reaction to these complaints? And how big were the Jewish communities in the Holy Land? The answers would give us a better sense about the socioeconomic and political background of the movement at its inception.

Jerusalem’s population never exceeded 10,000, with 3,000 to 4,000 Jews in the seventeenth century. The highest Ottoman authority in Jerusalem was the Ottoman *kadi*, and next to him a local governor. Normally the Ottoman authority in the provincial cities was maintained through three officials: *pasha* (governor), *kadi*, and *defterdar* (accountant). Although they had many other functions, the governor was primarily responsible for security, the *kadi* for daily affairs, and the *defterdar* for economic affairs in the city. All of them were appointed for one or two years. They represented the state and were in charge of the administration of the city, the enforcement of law, and tax collection.

Governors in states (*vilayets*) had a military unit at their command. Jerusalem and Gaza were not states but districts (*sancaks*) under the jurisdiction of the state (*vilayet*) of Damascus. Likewise, Izmir was under the jurisdiction of Aydin, and Salonica was under Sofia. That is, these cities did not have military units. Therefore, the *kadis* were generally as powerful as governors, if not more so. Sometime the Ottoman subjects, especially the *dhimmis*, found themselves victims of a power struggle between the *kadis* and rapacious governors. The *kadis* were aided by a security officer, *subaşı*. This system in the Arab lands changed little until the eighteenth century when a series of rebellions led to the decentralization of the empire and the rise of the local notables, *ayans*. Given this administrative structure in Jerusalem, the Sabbatean affair must have been dealt with by a *kadi* rather than a governor.

As Zeevi demonstrates, after the Ottoman conquest of the region at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it took several decades for Ottoman patterns

¹¹¹ Eremya Kömürciyan, “Sabatay Sevi Hakkında Ermenice Bir Şiir,” *Tarih ve Toplum*, Aralık (1991): 44–49.

of administration and economy to be established, and only in the second half of the sixteenth century did the Ottoman culture and the new outlook of a world empire to become a common part of people's worldview. In conformity with our previous discussion of the emergence of a distinct Ottoman Jewish identity in the seventeenth century, Zeevi claims that the second century of Ottoman rule was perhaps the clearest manifestation in this region of "the Ottoman way"—distinct set of norms and methods that represented the empire's rule in all realms of life.¹¹²

The big gates of Jerusalem were locked at sunset. Even during the day-time, entrance to the city was controlled. Christian and Jewish pilgrims were allowed to enter the city with a paid formal escort. Sometimes they were escorted by the city's police officer, the *subaşı*. Muslims coming from other cities had to go through an identification process before they entered the city.¹¹³ When Sabbatai traveled back and forth to Jerusalem, he must have had to establish his identity at the gates of the city every time.

Once Sabbatai formed a small group in Jerusalem, no one could expect any Ottoman involvement in their activities. The Holy Land was not foreign to the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim miracle workers in the seventeenth century. It was against Ottoman principles to meddle in *dhimmi* affairs as long as there was not a mass movement that could disturb the social and economic life of the city. Once a dissent or dissenting movement occurred, the first typical Ottoman reaction was to look for ways to contain and reintegrate its members back into the system. Since the Sabbatai incident had not reached a significant level of social disorder in the Holy Land, the *kadi* merely gave him a warning.

Sabbatai's increasing antinomian and scandalous activities angered both Jewish and Ottoman authorities, and he was once again banished from the city with the involvement of both the Jewish and the Ottoman authorities in early July. When he left for Jerusalem in the middle of a hot summer, news about him had already reached Safed, Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul, as well as European Jewish and Christian communities. It is still unknown why Nathan did not follow Sabbatai and chose to stay in Gaza instead. Did he think of himself as the precursor messiah (messiah of Joseph) as portrayed in the Jewish "double messiah" theory? We do not know. We are certain, though, that through his efforts in the Holy Land and letters to the world Jewish communities, Nathan accelerated the pace of the movement. He was, however, disseminating the news shrouded in a Lurianic vocabulary because Nathan's and Sabbatai's perceptions of the messiah and the messianic age were different from the start. Except for those three months in the Holy Land, Nathan never spent time with Sabbatai. After Sabbatai's conversion, Nathan first came to Bursa at the end of January 1667; then to Izmir, and then to Edirne in May of that year. In Edirne, the local rabbis forced him to sign an oath that he

¹¹² Zeevi, *An Ottoman Century*, 4–5.

¹¹³ Zeevi, *An Ottoman Century*, 19.

would not engage in any further messianic activity in the city.¹¹⁴ Although he always remained faithful to Sabbatai's messiahship, he never converted to Islam. However, neither did he ever speak a word against the conversion of the messiah, or the conversion of other believers. When the Sabbatean believers gathered in Salonica after the death of Sabbatai in 1676, Nathan came there to spend time among them, helping the believers to construct their peculiar theology. As I argue later, only then did Lurianism become part of the post-Sabbatai Dönme Kabbala.

To Nathan, Sabbatai has a peculiar rank in the kabbalistic scheme of creation. In September 1665, he wrote a letter to Raphael Joseph, in which he explained the changes in the hidden world with the arrival of the messianic age. To be part of that change, one needed to devote himself to Kabbalistic practices. The *kavvanot* (meditations) of Lurianic Kabbala were no longer valid because the inner structure of the universe had changed and no holy sparks were left under the domination of the powers of evil, the *qelippot*, except the biggest spark as prescribed in the Lurianic system. The final redemption would come when Sabbatai would convert the Turkish sultan to his cause, without resorting to any violence, and then, with the sultan's army behind him, cross the legendary River Sambation in the East, bring back the Ten Lost Tribes, and finally wages war against the ultimate enemy, Edom, Christianity. Until the start of the actual messianic age, for which they needed to wait one more year, they had to spend their time with penance, repentance, and devotion.¹¹⁵ For devotional practices, Nathan composed liturgies and handbooks for the masses and initiates separately. The handbooks were sent to Jewish communities in the empire and in Europe. Through these interpretations and elaborations, Nathan increasingly deviated from Sabbatai's own version of messianic age.

The tireless efforts of Nathan to spread the messianic faith through circular letters and pamphlets provoked both the Christian and Jewish worlds. In less than a year, the "good tidings" reached many Jewish, Christian, and Islamic millenarian communities throughout the world; they were expecting the imminent coming of the messiah and the "End of Days" as inscribed in age-old prophecies and detailed mystical calculations. Intoxicated by messianic fervor, many believers who lived outside the Ottoman Empire attempted to visit the messiah and join the first ranks behind him on the way to the Promised Land, Jerusalem. Interestingly, when the news spread beyond the Ottoman border, it was formulated in accordance with the need of Christian millenarians, not necessarily Jewish millenarians. News was not about Sabbatai, but about the appearance of the lost Ten Tribes of Israel, who were said to be marching under the command of a prophetic and saintly man of God about whom all sorts of miraculous stories were told. According to some versions, the Ten Tribes had been conquering Mecca; according to others they were assembling

¹¹⁴ Sasportas, *Tsitsat Novel Tsevi*, 205.

¹¹⁵ For a summary of the letter, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 290–297.

in the Sahara Desert, and in a third version they were marching into Persia. All of these rumors corroborated the myths about the famous Prester John, who filled the Christian imaginations for so long.¹¹⁶

On the way to Izmir, Sabbatai stayed in Safed and Aleppo¹¹⁷ and recruited more believers to his cause. Before he arrived at his hometown, a heated debate among the Jewish communities in Izmir broke out. Wearied rabbis in Istanbul had been closely monitoring the news about the emerging messiah. They dispatched a letter to the rabbis of Izmir, stating “the man who spreads those innovations is a heretic, and whosoever kills him will be accounted as one who has saved many souls.”¹¹⁸ None of these efforts, however, halted Sabbatai’s return to Izmir.

¹¹⁶ Charles Becketham, *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes* (London: Variorum, 1996).

¹¹⁷ For the Sabbatean activities among the Jews in Aleppo during and after the movements, see Leah Bornstein, “The Sabbateanism Movement in Aleppo and Its Influence According to New Sources.” I am thankful to Dr. Bornstein who let me use the draft of her unpublished paper.

¹¹⁸ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 249.

The Rise and Fall of the Sabbatean Movement in the Eurasian World

TRAVELING THE RECENTLY SECURED roads of Safed, Aleppo, and Anatolia, Sabbatai Sevi arrived at Izmir in September, shortly before the Jewish New Year in 1665. Expectedly, his arrival created a major commotion in the city. By the 1660s, Izmir was a city with a burgeoning economy and a population of 150,000, among whom were 6,000 to 7,000 Jews and thousands more Europeans. Thanks to the complex commercial and communication networks provided by the London-based Levant Company in the city, it was possible for all the news of the Ottoman Empire to be heard in Europe, and, likewise, for European news to reach Izmir. Because of that, the news about the messianic proclamation was widely circulated among the Jewish and Christian communities of the empire and Europe in a very short period of time by early modern standards.

The Ottoman authorities were aware of but indifferent to the movement until it began to be perceived as a source of “sedition” and a “threat” to the social, economic, and religious order. Similar to what had happened in Jerusalem, the Ottomans became involved in the Sabbatean affair in Izmir after Jews and other foreign merchants complained to the authorities about Sabbatai’s followers. Once the disturbing news reached the ears of the authorities in the imperial capital, Sabbatai was asked to come to Istanbul in January 1666. He was given a trial by the grand vizier, who imprisoned and subsequently banished him to a fortress on the Dardanelles. The exile and imprisonment of the messiah did nothing to dampen messianic fervor, however. On the contrary, it triggered a new wave of messianic eruptions among the believers, since, according to an age-old prophecy, the messiah would have to suffer before the ultimate redemption.

In response to new and increased signs of “sedition” among his followers, Sabbatai was transferred to the imperial palace in Edirne and tried in the presence of the sultan, during which he was offered a choice of converting to Islam or death. The messiah chose life over death, and “turned Turk,” receiving a handsome salary and honorary position at the palace at the expense of abandoning his disillusioned followers outside.

This chapter, by incorporating the Ottoman sources into the existing scholarship, attempts to provide a fuller version of the rise and fall of the movement in the Eurasian world, and argues that the Ottoman authorities perceived it as a heretical religious movement (*fitne*), not as a political revolt with possible military backing (*huruc*). As a result, they did not feel any urgent need to violently suppress it or kill its leader. The Ottoman accounts are in agreement with the European and Jewish sources in outlining the general trajectory of the movement, but they differ from them in some crucial points. It is the examination of these details that allows us to explore how Sabbatai Sevi b. Mordechai the Messiah became Aziz Mehmet Efendi b. Abdullah the Chief Gatekeeper. The chapter also demonstrates that, phenomenal as it was, the impact of the movement was not as powerful among the Jewish and Christian Ottoman communities, as it was in Europe.

Sultan's Gaze: Ottoman Perception of the Sabbatean Movement

The first full-fledged Ottoman narrative of the movement was penned by an eyewitness, Abdi Pasha (1630–1692), who was an official court historian (*vakanüvis*) and confidant of Sultan Mehmet IV. Given the sultan's keen interest in writing history, we can reasonably assume that Abdi's account contains some elements of a first-person sultanic narrative. As reflected many times in Abdi's chronicle, Mehmet IV was very fond of both reading history and keeping historical records.¹ Under the title "Of the Appearance of a Rabbi," dated September 16, 1666, Abdi relates the following:

Some time ago a rabbi (*haham*) appeared in Izmir. Because the Jewish community (*taife*) showed extreme fondness and leanings toward him, he was exiled (*nefy*) to the Fortress of the Strait (Boğazhisarı) in order to eliminate the sedition (*defi fitne*). But Jews gathered there too, and according to their false beliefs, they said "he is our prophet" and their events reached the point of being the cause of corruption and disturbance (*bais-i fesad u ihtilal*), and hence, the mentioned rabbi was brought to Edirne by order of the Sultan. On Thursday the 16th of Rebiulevvel, in a meeting (*akd-i meclis*) in the New Pavilion under the imperial gaze (*nazargah-i hümayun*), the kaimmakam pasha, sheikhulislam, and Vani Efendi questioned the rabbi. His majesty, our illustrious Sultan, watched and listened to [the meeting] secretly from a window. After all the dialogue, the aforementioned rabbi denied all the follies attributed to him. When it was proposed that he embrace Islam and he was told this with certainty at the end "after this meeting there is no way to get away! Either you embrace the faith, or you will be immediately put to death. If you became a Muslim, then we will intercede

¹ The sultan's interest in recordkeeping can be seen in the following incident: once Abdi Pasha was ill and he could not keep the records. The sultan saw him and said: "Nice yatarsın kalk vekayi' yaz" (Why are you still in bed? Get up and write up the events [in your chronicle!]). Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 64b. Also see 61a and 95b.

for you with our merciful Sultan,” the aforementioned rabbi, with the guidance of God, the Lord who forgives, immediately became the recipient of the Truth, ennobled with the light of faith and a responsible believer in God. From the exalted graciousness of the Chosroes-like emperor, a Middle Gate Pension (*kapu ortası teka‘udu*), valued at 150 aspers, was granted to him. He was immediately taken to the bath of the pages of the inner palace, where he was adorned in new clothes. He was dressed in a fur [coat] and a cloak of honor, and a purse of silver coins was also bestowed upon him. His partner (*refik*) who came with him at this time was given the position of sergeant (*çavuş*) by exalted imperial favor.²

Silahtar Mehmet Efendi (d. 1723), who was the next Ottoman chronicler after Abdi, relates the same story, quoting Abdi almost verbatim with only minor revisions.³ Raşid Efendi (d. 1735), an eighteenth-century chronicler, retells the story with additional details, explaining the ambiguities left by previous historians:

Sometime ago a rabbi, a Jew, became the center of attraction for the Jewish community. As their gathering became a source of sedition, the Jew was banished to Boğazhisarı. However, there too, he continued to be a source of sedition. On the 16th of Rebiulahir, he was taken into the presence of the Sultan (*rikab-i humayun*). While the sheikhulislam, Vani Efendi and kaimmakam were in the presence of the Sultan, the aforementioned rabbi was questioned about his actions. He denied all the follies attributed to him, and since he knew that he was going to be killed for sure, he preferred to convert to Islam.⁴

After Raşid Efendi, the Sabbatean affair appears to have sunk into oblivion in the eyes of the central Ottoman authorities. As discussed in the seventh chapter, the next Ottoman historian who gives an account of the Sabbatean affair was Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha (1832–1913). In describing the affair, Abdi and other Ottoman sources utilized concepts such as “appearance of a rabbi” (*zuhur-u haham*), “Jewish Prophet” (*Peygamber*), “source of sedition and corruption” (*bais-i fitne ve fesad*), “trial was held at the site of the Imperial gaze” (*nazargah-i hümayunda akd-i meclis olundu*), “ennobled with the glory of Islam” (*serefi Islam ile müşerref oldu*), and “Retired with a Middle Gate Pension” (*kapu ortası tekaudu erzan buyruldu*). These phrases have been used by modern scholarship without much reference to the actual historical and cultural world of the Ottomans. Staying mainly within Abdi Pasha’s framework, I give a historicized account of the rise and fall of the Sabbatean movement in Eurasian world.

² Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 214–215. In rendering this passage, I used Marc Baer’s translation with some revision. See his *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 127.

³ Silahdar, *Silahtar Tarihi*, I: 431–432.

⁴ Raşid Efendi, *Tarih-i Raşid* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1865), I: 133.

Izmir: The Messiah Appeared

Abdi opens his account by saying that a Jewish rabbi appeared in Izmir and that the Jews were fond of him. This suggests that the movement had been on the official Ottoman radar since its inception. During his early days in Izmir, Sabbatai kept a low profile, staying with his brother Elijah. After a few months he slowly emerged from seclusion, and his popularity grew daily, as seen in the exaggerated words of Paul Rycaut, the English ambassador in Izmir: “No invitation was now made in Smyrna, by the Jews, nor Marriages, or Circumcisions held, where Sabbatai was not present, accompanied to the solemnities by multitudes of his Followers, and the streets covered with Carpets or fine Cloth for him to tread on.”⁵

Confirming Rycaut’s account, Eremya Kömürcüyan mentions that Sabbatai walked on fine carpets and clothes during his processions.⁶ Publicly, he would recite the morning prayers in synagogue “with a very agreeable voice that greatly pleased those who heard him,” and would rise at midnight to perform ritual immersions in the sea. Some of the urban legends from those days still reverberate centuries later among the Dönmes. For example, the late Haluk Bitek, relates a story that he heard from his mother:

Amirah [Sabbatai Sevi] one morning goes to the seaside (in Izmir) and while he was there a dragon named Semachmen comes out of the sea and Amirah fights with it all day long and finally kills it and the whole sea becomes red with the blood of the dragon. When he returns home his mother meets him at the door of the house and asks him if he had eaten anything. He had not eaten anything the whole day. His mother had prepared fresh *burekas* (a typical Turkish savory pastry filled with cheese or meat, and one well-known to the Sephardic Jews of Turkey) and she immediately puts one into his mouth to eat. My maternal grandfather’s interpretation of this story was as follows: *Amirah* indeed went to the seaside, away from the noise of the town, to meditate and find solutions to various problems of his flock. The Dragon was his own self, his own ego with which he fought through his meditation in order to elevate himself spiritually. By the time he was done the day had come to end and the sun was setting. The coast of Izmir faces west and when the sun sets, it often appears red, and, along with it, the sea itself. His followers considered this day as a fast day and it became a tradition to break their fasts with a special pastry called *bureka*.⁷

Sabbatai’s growing popularity, coupled with his public displays of antinomian behavior, such as the pronouncing of the Ineffable Name and eating forbidden food, greatly upset the established Jewish authorities. Soon, a deep

⁵ Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Printed for John Starkey, 1668), 176.

⁶ Kömürcüyan, “Sabatay Sevi Hakkında Ermenice Bir Şiir.”

⁷ In one of our conversations, Haluk Bitek confirmed this story, which was already published on several websites.

enmity developed between his supporters and opponents, an antagonism that soon expressed itself through violence. On December 12, 1665, Sabbatai, accompanied by a large crowd of his supporters, burst into the synagogue of the Portuguese congregation, the “headquarters” of his opponents, smashing the doors with an ax. Challenging the traditional Jewish authorities there, he read the portion of the Torah not from the customary scroll but from a printed copy, and called women up to read from the Torah.⁸ Then he went up to the ark, took a holy scroll in his arms, and sang an ancient Castilian love song, “Meliselda, the Emperor’s Daughter,” a song that was known as his favorite throughout his life.

As the movement gained strength, the social and economic life of Izmir was heavily affected by the messianic chaos engulfing it. European merchants expressed concern about the demise of economic life in the city.⁹ Reports from cities such as London and Amsterdam show that regular business dealings with the Jews became problematic because of their belief that the End of Days was at hand.¹⁰ Tens of male and female “prophets” were heralding the coming of the Messianic Age on the streets. People were abandoning their daily affairs, and many believers were engaging in penitential practices. Through a Christian lens, Hammer writes that Sabbatai, “the Antichrist,” wrote letters to Jews all around the world when he was in Izmir, and that he called himself the First Created, the only Son of God, the Messiah and Redeemer of Israel.¹¹ It should be noted that Muslim and Christian observers of the movement differed on one major point: the Muslims perceived the movement mostly within a political framework and referred to it as a source of sedition, whereas the Christians tended to see it mostly from a religious point of view and frequently referred to the protagonist as the Antichrist, which was a very common theme in pre-modern Christian prophecy books.

As a response to the agitation in the city, and rabbinical and European complaints, Sabbatai was ordered to appear before the Ottoman authorities. Since Izmir was a provincial district (*sancak*), the highest Ottoman authority there was the Ottoman judge, *kadi* (Figure 2.1):

Sabbatai had courage and boldness to enter into dispute with the Grand Kocham [i.e., chief rabbi], between whom the argument grew so high and language so hot that the Jews who favored the doctrine of Sabbatai and feared the authority of the Kocham, doubtful what might be the issue of the contest, appeared in great numbers before the Kaddee of Smyrna in justification of their new Prophet, before so much as any accusation came against him; the Kaddee according to the custom

⁸ About Sevi’s women followers and prophets, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi, 1666–1816* (Oxford: Littman, 2011), 15–57.

⁹ Arakel, *Book of History*, 551.

¹⁰ Shlomo Simonsohn, “A Christian Report from Constantinople Regarding Shabbethai Sevi 1666,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 12 (1961): 33–58. For the Sabbatean movement in Europe, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, ch. 5.

¹¹ Hammer, *Osmanlı Devleti Tarihi*, 165.



FIGURE 2.1 A seventeenth-century Izmir panorama and *kadi* court. By Dutch artist and traveler, Cornelis de Bruijn, 1683.

of the Turks swallowed money on both sides, and afterwards remitted them to the determination of their own justice.¹²

Bribed or convinced, the *kadi* gave the Jewish community some time to resolve the issue by itself. To Sabbatai's followers, the result was a miracle. As they saw it, Sabbatai had, on behalf of his subjects, appeared before the *kadi*, demanded relief from the oppression which aggrieved them, and had prevailed.

In the meantime, the Jewish community was polarized around two eminent rabbis, Hayim Benveniste who accepted Sabbatai's messianic call, and Aaron Lapapa who opposed it. The supporters of Sabbatai gained so much power in the city that several of his opponents, mostly followers of Rabbi Lapapa and Solomon Algazi, were harassed or persecuted, with many expelled from the city. In the following days, Sabbatai ordered his adherents to leave any mention of the sultan out of their daily prayers—a practice that had been a Sephardic custom for centuries—and to replace it with his own name. When it became clear to the authorities that it would not be possible to contain the movement within the jurisdiction of Izmir, Sabbatai was summoned to the capital by the grand vizier.

Escorted by Ottoman soldiers, Sabbatai and his three “kings”—Moses Galante, Daniel Pinto, and R. Elijah—set off for Istanbul on December 30, 1665.¹³ He left his wife Sarah behind.¹⁴ According to Rycaut, he told his disciples that he was called by God to visit Istanbul where the greatest part of his work was to be accomplished.¹⁵ He was put on a ship, while some of his

¹² Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 176.

¹³ Coenen, *Shabtai Tsevi*, 62.

¹⁴ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 433.

¹⁵ Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 178.

disciples traveled over land to meet him again in Istanbul. Because of a strong headwind from the north, the ship ran aground on an island in the Marmara Sea. Meanwhile the Turkish authorities in the capital had grown alarmed by the various troubling Sabbatean-related reports coming from different parts of the empire. They now began to see Sabbatai as a real threat, and the grand vizier sent an order to Mehmet Aga, director of customs on Marmara Island on February 2, 1666, urging him to bring Sabbatai to Istanbul at once:

To Mehmet Agha the Director of Customs: A Jew who seems to have been in the habit of uttering futile words, was stuck on the Marmara Island on the way from Izmir to Istanbul. Dispatch your men immediately and get him here from wherever he was.¹⁶

Sabbatai was brought to Istanbul on February 5 or 6, by the officers who had arrested him on Marmara Island.¹⁷ On those dates, both the sultan and the grand vizier were near Istanbul. The believers waiting for Sabbatai in Istanbul were derided by members of the local population. Kömürcüyan relates that children of Istanbul were mocking the believers, shouting “geldi mi, çifut geldi mi, mesih geldi mi?” (Did he come, did the Jew come, and did the messiah come?).¹⁸

For the Ottomans, Sabbatai was a “false” Jewish prophet. Abdi refers to him as a Jewish rabbi (*haham*), and then prophet (*peygamber*). Silahtar and Raşid add the term *cehud* (a pejorative term for Jews) to his description.¹⁹ None of the Ottoman chroniclers mentioned that he was a messiah. Why the Ottoman observers called Sabbatai “prophet” and not “messiah” is still an unanswered question. Even Rycaut occasionally refers to him as a prophet. Kömürcüyan mentions that Sabbatai had a stamp that read “Sabbatai, the prophet of the Jews.”²⁰ One of the reasons for this, as discussed in Chapter 4, could be that Sabbatean Kabbalah was closer to the “prophetic” Abulafian tradition than to the speculative Lurianic tradition.

The Ottoman sources referred to the rise of the movement as *zuhur* (appearance), not *huruc* (coming out), and its dissemination as “sedition” (*fitne*). These are important Ottoman political terms, which could help us to historicize the Ottoman treatment of the movement. In a political context, *zuhur* would usually refer to an unarmed revolt against the authorities, whereas *huruc* would

¹⁶ BOA. A.RSK. Dosya # 31/113. Cited in Erhan Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih: Sabbatay Sevi ve Yahudiler* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yay, 2013), 114. The document is dated 27 R[ecel] 1076 (February 2, 1666). Afyoncu, however, seems to misread the month as Rebiulahir, instead of Receb, and concludes that it was dispatched on November 6, 1665.

¹⁷ Coenen, *Shabtai Tsevi*, 62. A Venetian observer, who was present in Istanbul at the time, gives the date as February 5. “Lettera Mandata Da Constanipoli a Roma intorno al Nuovo Messia De Gli Ebrei” (Siena: n. p., 1667). I am grateful to Giancarlo Casale who translated this report from Italian for me.

¹⁸ Arakel, *Book of History*, 550.

¹⁹ A seventeenth-century lexicographer, Meninski, defines the term as follows: “C-H-V-D: Pek çalışıcı, Laborious, animosus, quvalde conatur & allaborat Judaeus. Jud. Giudeo, Ebreo, Iuif.” *Thesaurus Linguarum Orientalium Turcicae-Arabicae-Persicae* (Reprinted, İstanbul: Simurg, 2000).

²⁰ Kömürcüyan, “Sabatay Sevi Hakkında Ermenice Bir Şiir.”

refer to an armed rebellion. *Huruc* can be best formulated in Islamic political theory as “huruc ‘ale’s-sultan,” that is, coming out [in rebellion] against the sultan. For example, Katip Çelebi and Naima both describe the influence of Cinci Hoca as “Zuhur-i Cinci Hoca.”²¹ But Ottoman historians describe the emergence of Osman, who was the founder of the Ottoman empire in 1300, as “huruc-i Osman”²² and that of Selim I in 1511 as “huruc-i Selim.”²³ Both incidents, needless to say, contain armed revolts against the authorities. Similarly, “huruc-i sheikh-i Sakarya” (1638),²⁴ “huruc-i kuffar” (1645),²⁵ and “huruc-i Ibrahim Pasha” (1647)²⁶ were all meant to express “armed revolt against the sultan.”

Likewise the term *fitne* has strong historical associations in Islamic tradition. In the social and political context, *fitne* is defined as sedition, revolt, disturbance, or even civil war. It also involves armed conflicts that have a direct bearing on the values of faith.²⁷ The Ottoman reaction to a *fitne* varied depending on the specific times and conditions. Once a person or movement was labeled *fitne* or the cause of *fitne*, a form of punishment, ranging from warnings to exile or death, could be expected. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many individuals and groups who expressed dissent toward established religious or political authorities were treated under the categories of “heresy,” “apostasy,” and *fitne*.²⁸

Some of the religious dissenters and *fitne* cases, chastised by the Ottoman authorities in the seventeenth century are Nadjali Sarı Abdurrahman Efendi (1602),²⁹ Oğlan Sheikh Ibrahim Efendi,³⁰ Sunullah Gaybi,³¹ Idris-i Muhtefi,³² the Sheikh of Sakarya (1638),³³ the Sheikh of Diyarbakır (1638),³⁴ Cyril the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople (1638),³⁵ the Greek Patriarch of

²¹ Katip Çelebi, *Fezleke* (Istanbul, 1871), II: 229; and Naima, *Tarih-i Naima* (Istanbul, 1866), IV: 35. Cinci Hoca, an uneducated exorcist, became quite influential in the politics of Sultan Ibrahim's court in the 1640s. He was deposed and chastised because of his proclivity for corruption and sedition at the palace.

²² Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 105, 119.

²³ Anonim *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, ed. Nihat Azamat (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1992), 92.

²⁴ Katip Çelebi, *Fezleke*, II: 195; *Tarih-i Naima*, IV: 329.

²⁵ *Tarih-i Naima*, IV: 131.

²⁶ *Tarih-i Naima*, 248.

²⁷ L. Gardet, “Fitna,” in EI².

²⁸ For the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cases, see A. Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zindiklar ve Mulhidler* (Istanbul: TTV 1998).

²⁹ Ocak, *Zindiklar*, 243.

³⁰ Ocak, *Zindiklar*, 265.

³¹ Bilal Kemikli, *Sunullah-i Gaybi* (Ankara: Akcag, 1990).

³² Ocak, *Zindiklar*, 310–313.

³³ *Tarih-i Naima*, III: 335–338.

³⁴ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyehatname*, IV: 40–41; *Tarih-i Naima*, III: 385.

³⁵ Voltaire, *Universal History* (London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1759), IV: 271. In 1638, Cyril the Greek patriarch of Constantinople was ordered to be strangled upon the repeated accusation of his own people.

Constantinople (1657),³⁶ John the Quaker (1661),³⁷ Sütçü Beşir Agha (1662),³⁸ Lari Mehmet (1665), Diyarbakırı Kürd Mahdi Mehmet (1667), Shilo Sabbatai (1671),³⁹ four English Quakers (1672),⁴⁰ Karabaş Ali Efendi (1679),⁴¹ Niyazi Misri (1674 and 1676),⁴² and Mahdi of Edirne (1694).⁴³ Despite the political scrutiny of the nonconformist *fitne* cases, the period was also a time when “heretical” ideas were widely embraced by dissenting elite and commoners alike. Commenting on atheism, Rycaut makes the following startling observation: “This poisonous Doctrine is so infectious, that it is crept into the Chambers of the Seraglio, into the apartments of the Ladies and Eunuchs, and found entertainment with the Pasha’s and their whole Court.”⁴⁴ After listing many “heretical” schools of thought in the empire and particularly in Istanbul, such as Bektashis, Hubmesihis, Hairetis, Ishrakis, Munafihis, and Sabis, Rycaut continues:

Certainly the diversity of opinions in Turkey is almost infinite, and more numerous than in England, or other parts of Christendom. . . . The reason [for] this variety, amongst the Turks I attribute to the many Religions which voluntarily, and for interest or by force have entered into the Mahometan superstition.⁴⁵

Some of those voluntary converts seem to have kept their beliefs to themselves. Examining a few of those *fitne* cases can give us clues about the Ottoman attitude toward the *fitne* in general and Sabbateanism in particular. In June 1638, a dervish named Ahmet fashioned himself as a *mahdi* (Muslim messiah) and Jesus Christ in the town of Sakarya. He and a few of his followers

³⁶ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 32b. Hammer, *Osmalı Tarihi*, 23. During the time of Mehmed Köprülü, a Greek patriarch was found to have sent a letter to the Transylvanian Voivoda, urging him to get ready for the end of the Ottoman Empire. Köprülü summoned the patriarch to his presence and interrogated him. The patriarch told him that he had been writing similar letters every year in order to raise more alms. His explanation was not found convincing, and he was hanged in Parmakkapı on January 3, 1657.

³⁷ Dr. Covel’s *Diary*, 16. In the introduction of this book, Theodore Bent relates that “an individual called ‘John the Quaker’ arrived at Constantinople in 1661 and began to preach at the street corners repentance to the Turks in his own native tongue. The Mohammedans looked upon him as lunatic, and consigned him to a mad house, where he languished for eight months.”

³⁸ Ocak, *Zindiklar*, 306. He was a Melami sheikh who was executed in 1662 on the charge of propagating the *hurufi* heresy. Köprülü Ahmed blamed and deposed Sheikhlislam Sunizade for making a hasty judgment about him. Minkarizade Yahya Efendi was appointed as the new sheikhlislam.

³⁹ Cengiz Sisman, “A Jewish Messiah from Tartaria in 1671,” *Kabbalah* 9 (2004): 63–75.

⁴⁰ Elias Wilson, *The Travels, Adventures, and Martyrdom of Four Eminent Quakers Who in the Year 1672* (London: Printed by John Lock, 1673).

⁴¹ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 143b.

⁴² Derin Terzioğlu, “Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyazi Misri” *Studia Islamica*, 94 (2002): 139–165. Due to his “heretical” ideas, Misri was exiled to Rhodes in 1673, then to Limni between the years 1676 and 1691.

⁴³ Hammer, *Osmalı Devleti Tarihi*, 526. He claimed himself to be a Mahdi.

⁴⁴ Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 130.

⁴⁵ Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 135.

murdered their sheikh, claiming that he had not been serving their purposes. Soon, Ahmet's followers "appeared" and created major sedition (*fitne-yi azime*) in the city. Having heard the news, Sultan Murat IV immediately dispatched an army to deal with the rebels, but the army could not defeat the 6,000 to 7,000 dervishes. Only in the second raid were the sheikh and his followers captured and taken before the sultan:

"Look at you! You claimed that you were Jesus Christ. Is that true?" asked the Sultan. "God forbid, I am a person, from the community of Muhammad, and waiting for the coming of Jesus,"⁴⁶ said Ahmet. But that answer could not save him from execution. His followers were of the opinion that Ahmet could not get harmed by any weapon. In order to discredit this legend, first, his fingers were cut in pieces. He did not show any sign of pain. On the contrary he even said to the executioner: "take your time in doing your job!" Those who have been watching, were amazed at what they had seen. Then, he was put on a donkey, [and] rode throughout the army camp. Then, his nose, ears, hands, and feet were cut off. And he died in this state.⁴⁷

Ahmet's movement was seen as a political crime, that is, *huruc* and *fitne*; therefore, he was sentenced to a brutal death in accordance with the rules of Ottoman *siyaset*, which refers to the death penalty meted out as a result of 'political' crimes. In the same year, another sheikh from Diyarbakır, who had more than 40,000 followers, was put to death on the sultan's order, charged with being a political threat to sultanic authority.⁴⁸ Another sheikh from Akhisar was accused of converting to Christianity and executed with twenty-two of his followers in 1649.⁴⁹ The case of Lari Mehmet constitutes a very telling example, showing the range of Ottoman responses to individual heresies. He was accused of being an atheist who denied Islamic principles such as fasting, daily prayers, and belief in the Day of Judgment, and he also consumed alcohol. He was sentenced to death on February 24, 1665, and his books were confiscated and sold a week later. An archival document, dated March 23, 1665, shows that the authorities saw an inherent danger in circulating his books freely, and they subsequently decided to recollect them from the book dealers and either put them in the palace library or destroy them.⁵⁰ Among his books were European maps and medical texts. Following this incident closely,

⁴⁶ There is an Islamic belief that Jesus will come at the end of time and fight against the Antichrist. Then he will help the *mahdi* until the Judgment Day.

⁴⁷ Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, III: 335–338.

⁴⁸ For a detailed story of the sheikh, see Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, III: 385; and Evliya Çelebi, *Seyehatname*, IV: 41. Knowing him personally, Evliya felt very sorry about the murder of the sheikh and called him a martyr. To Evliya, the sultan's advisors misled him, claiming that the sheikh had political ambitions, therefore he and his followers could have posed a grave danger to sultanic authority.

⁴⁹ F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultan* (New York: Clarendon, 1929), II: 421.

⁵⁰ BOA, MAD 2873, p. 4. I am grateful to Idris Bostan, who provided me a copy of this document.

Mehmet IV examined Lari's death sentence and passed it on to his court historian Abdi, and asked him to register it in the chronicle.⁵¹

Had Lari confessed his error and not been persistent in his "blasphemy," he could have saved his life. In February 1666, almost exactly one year after Lari's trial, Sevi was brought to Istanbul. Unlike Lari, Sevi was merely given a warning and then banished to a castle since he was not insistent on his "blasphemy."

The best example against which to compare the Sabbatean affair is the case of Sheikh Abdullah from Diyarbakır, who proclaimed that his son was the *mahdi*. The event took place only seven months after the Sabbatean affair. Sheikh Seyyid Abdullah, who was a learned Islamic scholar in the town of İmadiyye, claimed that his son, Seyyid Mehmed, was the *mahdi*, and he gathered a following of some of the local Kurds. Since the movement was seen as a source of *fitne*, the governor of Mosul, Ali Pasha, and the *kadi* of İmadiye acted together to crush the movement. Both the father and son were caught and brought to the palace. During the trial they denied all the charges. On May 25, 1667, they were brought before the sultan, sheikhulislam, and the court preacher Vani Efendi in Edirne. Similar to Sabbatai's trial, both father and son were tried in an irregular setting in the presence of the sultan, Vani Efendi, and the sheikhulislam. At the end of the trial, neither the father nor the son was punished because of "heresy" and sedition; instead, the son was promoted at the palace, and the father was granted a Sufi lodge in Edirne.⁵²

The Ottoman authorities responded to cases of heresy and sedition differently depending on the political circumstances. When a group or an individual was seen as a threat to the established religious and political authorities, the Ottomans did not hesitate to punish the transgressor with death. Overall, however, as opposed to the modern central states, the empire chose to negotiate with the dissidents and co-opt them rather than crushing them totally. After all, the empire had a vast territory and it needed to have a sizable population to cultivate the land. Sultans could not afford the luxury of massive annihilation of people.

Sabbatai and his movement were seen as *zuhur* and *fitne*, but not as an armed revolt against the sultan with the political aim of creating a kingdom in the Holy Land. In that regard, the movement was not a proto-nationalist or Zionist movement, as claimed in modern scholarship. Had similar claims been made by a Muslim messiah, he and his followers might well have been treated differently, since they would have been more likely to make a political claim to the imperial throne. Another reason the movement was treated

⁵¹ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 57a. For more, *Tarih-i Naima*, I: 313; *Silahtar Tarihi*, I: 378; *Rasid, Tarih-i Rasid*, I: 94; Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 129–130; and Hammer, *Ottoman Devleti Tarihi*, 143–144.

⁵² Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 81a and 82b. Also Kamil Pasha, *Tarih-i Siyasi* (Istanbul: Matbaa-yi Ahmet İhsan, 1909), II: 103; and Hammer, *Ottoman Devleti Tarihi*, 168.

nonviolently may have been the general self-confidence of the sultan. Had the movement taken place before the era of the Köprülü viziers, the result might have been different, as all social movements could have been perceived as a political threat in those politically precarious years. The fact that Sabbatai did not insist on his “mistake” determined the fate of the movement. Last, as also shown by Marc Baer, the personalities of Sultan Mehmet IV and his advisors, who wanted to enlarge their Muslim flock, played a crucial role in what turned out to be the relatively gentle treatment of Sabbatai and his followers.⁵³

Istanbul: The Messiah Imprisoned

Sabbatai was brought from Izmir to Istanbul in chains and was “deposited to the Customs house.”⁵⁴ Prior to his arrival, the leaders of Istanbul’s Jewish congregation went to the grand vizier, and told him “one from our nation is coming here and pretends to be the messiah. But we do not believe in him. You will know what to do.”⁵⁵ A Venetian reporter says that Sabbatai was met by five to six Turkish “police” as he embarked from the ship and was beaten with fists and clubs. He was then put in prison until he was taken to the presence of the grand vizier.⁵⁶ Scholem thinks that Kasim Pasha was the kaimmakam of Istanbul and he handled the Sabbatai affair in Istanbul. Kaimmakams were the deputies appointed to oversee affairs in the city only in the absence of both the sultan and the grand vizier. In those days, not Kasim Pasha but Mustafa Pasha (who later came to be known as the Grand Vizier Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha) was the kaimmakam who dealt with Sabbatai.⁵⁷ Kara Mustafa had been perhaps the most active player in the Sabbatean affair from beginning to end. He was also going to be present at Sabbatai’s trial in 1666, and in 1673.

A few days later, Sabbatai was brought to the meeting of the Divan, presided over by the grand vizier, Ahmet Fazil. Both Sheikhulislam Minkarizade and Kaimmakam Mustafa Pasha must have been at the trial, since they were

⁵³ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 105–120.

⁵⁴ Arakel, *Book of History*, 551.

⁵⁵ Baruh of Arezzo, cited in Aaron Freimann, *Inyanei Sabbati Zwi* (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1912), 50.

⁵⁶ “Lettera Mandata Da Constanpoli.”

⁵⁷ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 65a. Kasim Pasha was the Beglerbeyi of Temeşvar and was promoted to the viziership and the governorship of Budin on April 7, 1666. Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 72a. Ballarino says that Sevi was under the custody of “Cassas Bassi,” which possibly referred to the title of one of the Ottoman security officers in the city. Ballarino, “Letter to Dodge.” An English traveler, Edward Browne, who visited the Balkans in 1669, refers to the person who handled Sabbatai as “Cussum Basha” as well. Browne, *A Brief Account of Some Travels in Hungaria, Macedonia* (London, 1673), 58. Browne relates that he heard some Turkish. “Songs, especially concerning Sevi, the famous Jewish Impostor, who had made a great noyse in the world, and how Cussum Bajha so handled him, that he was glad to turn Turk.” Based on this account, Cecil Roth and Scholem claimed that Kasim Pasha was a key figure in the Sabbatean affair. See Cecil Roth, “New Light on the Apostasy of Sabbatai Sevi,” *JQR* (1963): 185–190.

the regular members of the Divan. During the trial, Sabbatai denied his messianic claims before the highest Ottoman authorities, saying “I am neither a king nor a prophet. I am not a notable but a common man who earns his living by reading.”⁵⁸ As we have seen in the previous “sedition” cases, the “culprits” were executed without any hesitation if they insisted on their claims. After interrogation, Sabbatai was held in one of the prisons in Istanbul until April 16, 1666, when he was exiled to a fortress on the Dardanelles. Freely reasonably speculates that the dungeon where Sabbatai was kept was probably the infamous Bagno, a byzantine tower on the Golden Horn that for centuries had been used to incarcerate galley slaves.⁵⁹

Sabbatai’s followers believed that the imprisonment was a preliminary sign of an old prophecy, according to which the messiah was going to disappear for nine months and then return, riding a female lion, with seven snakes on its head. After this he would unite with the lost Jewish tribes who lived on the other side of the mystical river, Sambation. Thereafter he would be the sole king of the world. The rabbis were divided among themselves on the issue, some of the outstanding ones, among them, Abraham Al-Nakawa, taking his side. As discussed later, most of Istanbul’s Jews kept themselves far from this messianic euphoria.

We do not have an indication that the sultan personally was involved in the Sabbatean affair at this stage. He was out of Istanbul by the time Sabbatai arrived.⁶⁰ In the fall of 1665 and the winter of 1666, however, he spent his time in Istanbul in order to attend the opening of the New Mosque there and to preside over the preparations for a major military expedition to Crete. The sultan had left Edirne with the army on his way to Istanbul on August 17, 1665. Before arriving he headed south so as to visit the newly built defensive fortresses overlooking the Dardanelles. He arrived at Istanbul on October 12 and attended the opening of the New Mosque, where Vani Efendi gave the first Friday Sermon on October 29. As Sabbatai was preparing to come to Istanbul, the sultan was on a hunting excursion in one of the neighboring towns in Istanbul. The weather was extremely bad for almost a month, preventing the hunt, and the sultan returned to the Davud Pasha Palace, located in the outskirts of Istanbul.⁶¹ The same bad weather was meanwhile affecting Sabbatai’s voyage to Istanbul. A week before Sabbatai’s arrival, the sultan had been in the Davud Pasha Mosque next to the aforementioned palace, listening to the fiery Friday sermon of Vani Efendi, whose influence on the sultan was growing

⁵⁸ Arakel, *Book of History*, 553.

⁵⁹ John Freely, *The Lost Messiah: In Search of Sabbatai Sevi* (London: Penguin, 2002), 111.

⁶⁰ Mehmed IV never liked Istanbul. In his reign, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire was virtually moved to Edirne. He is reported to have said: “What am I going to do in Istanbul. Did living in Istanbul not cost my father’s life? Were my predecessors not beaten by oppressors? Instead of returning to Istanbul, I would prefer to set it on fire with my own hands and then sadly watch it.” Hammer, *Osmâniye Devleti Tarihi*, 115.

⁶¹ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 70a.

with each passing day.⁶² Only a day or two before Sabbatai arrived, the sultan left on a hunting trip again, on either February 5 or 6, 1666, leaving the Vizier Mustafa Pasha as the kaimmakam in Istanbul.⁶³ The sultan returned to Istanbul on Friday, February 18. In preparation for the Crete expedition, the sultan, the grand vizier, and the army left the Davud Pasha military camp for Edirne on April 12, 1666.⁶⁴ On the same day, two top military officials, Kapucular Kethudasi Ishak Agha and Silahdar Hasan Agha, were rebuked by the sultan for not having enough *sipahi*, or cavalry, ready for the upcoming campaign. By an imperial edict, they were deposed from their posts and imprisoned (*habs*), being subsequently banished (*nefy*) to Boğazhisarı, just a few days before Sabbatai was exiled to the same place.⁶⁵

According to Sasportas, Judah ben Mordehai ha-Kohen, the grand vizier's financial advisor and a possible Sabbatean sympathizer, interceded and had him transferred to Gallipoli.⁶⁶ Ballarino thinks that he requested the transfer because of the unpleasant environment in the prison.⁶⁷ One of the rabbis who accompanied Sabbatai to Istanbul returned to Izmir and wrote the following letter to Amsterdam on April 5:

By Order of the Grand Signior he is conveyed to a Castle at Gallipoli about 30 Leagues distant from Constantinople because the Grand Signior and prime Vizier were to go for Adrianapole to [make] warlike preparations against the Tatars, to the end the said King during their absence might be secured against any attempts of the Tumulting Multitude, and this rather because the City was so full of strangers which flocked from all parts to see him and speak with him.⁶⁸

It seems that the vizier, and most probably the sultan too, followed the news about Sabbatai and did not want to leave any Sabbatean-related disorder or "sedition" behind while they were away for the Crete war. For that reason the vizier banished him to a fortress on the Dardanelles.

Dardanelles: The Messiah Exiled

Banishment or exile (*nefy*) was one of the least violent solutions for the crime of "sedition" in the empire. Sabbatai was banished and sent to fortress imprisonment on April 19, the day before Passover. Exiling the purported messiah

⁶² Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 70a.

⁶³ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 70b.

⁶⁴ Although it is not clear whether the vizier left Istanbul in the same day, we know for sure that he was with the sultan in the Fener region, located in the outskirts of Istanbul, on April 14. From this information, we may conclude that the vizier left Istanbul before Sevi was sent into exile on April 16.

⁶⁵ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 72a.

⁶⁶ Jacob Sasportas, *Tsitsat novel Tsevi* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1954), 75; Also Rosanes, *Divrei yemei Yisrael*, IV: 68.

⁶⁷ Ballarino [Venetian Ambassador], "Letter to Dodge, dated March 8, 1666," REJ, 34 (1897): 305–8.

⁶⁸ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 455.

did not eradicate the “sedition,” however. On the contrary, banishment merely made the messianic claims stronger in the eyes of the believers. According to the age-old prophecy, the messiah was supposed to suffer before the final redemption. Hence his exile was seen as a sign of prophecy fulfilled. His time in prison was probably the most productive time of his life, since he had a relatively comfortable and protected dwelling, and it was there that he established the parameters of his new theology. For example, he sacrificed a Passover lamb and roasted it with its fat, inducing his companions to eat this forbidden food and blessing it with the now customary blessing and festival. He abrogated many of the Jewish holidays, including the Ninth of the month of Av, a day of mourning and fasting, and instituted new ones, including marking his birthday as the day of rejoicing. He sent letters to his followers in all lands, commanding them to observe a new holiday as the Great Sabbath, and threatening a death sentence on anyone who should desecrate it.⁶⁹ In another letter, he wrote “today you have managed to see this great day of God. . . . You have accepted me for the sake of freeing and saving Israel . . . thus, may your wailing turn into rejoicing, and the day of mourning into a day of happiness and festivities, for as of today you shall no longer cry, O my children of Israel.”⁷⁰ These Hebrew letters were translated into Latin, Armenian, and even Ottoman languages. In a while, the believers converted his detention into an honorable confinement, and the fortress became known to his followers by the Hebrew Migdal Oz (Tower of Strength).⁷¹

The sources are in disagreement as to the whereabouts of the fortress and Migdal Oz, where Sabbatai was exiled. For example, Abdi states that he was exiled to Boğazhisarı, Kamil Pasha thinks that it was Kale-i Sultani,⁷² De la Croix claims it was the “new fortress,”⁷³ Hammer suggests that it was the one on the European side, Rosanes thinks that it was Kumkale, and Scholem speculates that it was Abydos.⁷⁴ Which one was the castle that we are looking for?

There were four fortresses on the Dardanelles: Kale-i Sultanije, Kilitbahir, Seddü'l-Bahir, and Kumkale; all of them were referred to as *boğazhisarı*, a generic name for the fortresses overlooking the straits (including the ones on the Bosphorus in Istanbul).⁷⁵ For example, Katip Çelebi calls the first two *boğazhisarı*.⁷⁶ Grelot, traveling from Izmir to Istanbul by the sea in the 1680s, refers to all of them as “Boghase-issari,” or the Castle of the Throat.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ For the letter, see Yaron Ben-Naeh, “Unknown Letter of Sabbatai Sevi on Hag Amerot / Festival of Luminaries and Shabbat Kudesh / Holy Sabbath” [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 80 (2012): 89–105.

⁷⁰ Arakel, *Book of History*, 555.

⁷¹ This symbol is originated from Proverbs 18:10: “The name of the Lord is a tower of strength; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.”

⁷² Kamil Pasha, *Tarih-i Siyasi*, II: 104.

⁷³ De La Croix, *Mémoires du Sieur de La Croix* (Paris: Chez Claude Barbin, 1684), 355.

⁷⁴ Hammer, *Osmâni Devleti Tarihi*, 166.

⁷⁵ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 67b.

⁷⁶ Katip Çelebi, *Tuhfetü'l-Kibar fi Esraril-Bihar* (Istanbul: Matbaay-i Amire, 1879), 148.

⁷⁷ Guillaume-Joseph Grelot, *A Late Voyage to Constantinople Containing the Dardanelles* (London: Printed by John Playford, 1683), 17–21.

The Kale-i Sultaniye on the Anatolian side and Kilitbahir (Figure 2.2), on the European side were built in 1463 during the time of Mehmet II. The former one was also called Abydos, since stones of the ancient Abydos city were used for its building.⁷⁸ A late sixteenth-century traveler, R. Dallam, refers to the former one as Abidose, the latter one, Sestos.⁷⁹ The other fortresses, Seddü'l-Bahir (also called Hakaniye) on the European side and Kumkale (also called Sultaniye) on the Anatolian side were constructed a few years before the Sabbatean event under the patronage of Queen Mother Hatice Turhan. However they did not have towers, *migdal*, in those fortresses.⁸⁰

My own field work on the Dardanelles, along with textual examination, convinced me that Kilitbahir was the place where Sabbatai was imprisoned. First, only Kilitbahir (Figure 2.2) has a tall tower in the middle. Evliya Çelebi refers to it as the fortress that has a tall and strong tower in the middle.⁸¹ Second, the main idea of exile is to cut the wrongdoer off from his former networks. The Kale-i Sultani was in the middle of the town of Çanakkale, where there was a sizable Jewish community. Confining him to this fortress would defeat the purpose of exile. Kilitbahir, on the other hand, was a relatively isolated town of only a few hundred houses. What is more, Abdi's and Evliya Çelebi's account of the palace official, who was exiled to a fortress on the Dardanelles in 1666, proves that Boğazhisarı and Kilitbahir were one and the same place. While Abdi refers to it as Boğazhisarı,⁸² Evliya Çelebi calls it Kilitbahir.⁸³

As Sabbatai's visitors flocked to the city from the empire and Europe, the food and housing shortage became a pressing issue for the inhabitants of this



FIGURE 2.2 The Kilitbahir Fortress, Dardanelle, 2004. Photo courtesy of the author.

⁷⁸ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyehatname*, V: 161.

⁷⁹ "Thomas Dallam's Travel," in *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1880), 50.

⁸⁰ For these fortresses, see Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*, 1–186.

⁸¹ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyehatname*, V: 160.

⁸² Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 71b.

⁸³ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyehatname*, V:160.

small town. Prices rose in the town—possibly along with the rate of crime. The number of visitors could not have been as high as it was claimed, but still there were significant numbers of visitors. It remains a mystery as to how the visitors were able to visit Sabbatai in prison. If he was in a dungeon, as some of the early woodcuts depict, then it would have been almost impossible for visitors to see him in great numbers. Jewish scholars tend to explain this mystery by arguing that the believers repeatedly bribed the Ottoman guards in order to visit their messiah in the dungeon. Ottoman sources, however, suggest that Sabbatai was banished to a fortress as *kalebend*—someone ordered “confined” to a fortress but not as prisoner. Kamil Pasha writes, for example, that Sevi was exiled as a *kalebend*. Such a status would often allow the sentenced to receive outsiders and communicate with them.⁸⁴

The unusual commotion in the city alarmed the inhabitants and, in time, the authorities. In addition to the growing social disorder within the town, another interesting event spurred the authorities to take action. A rabbi from Poland by the name of Nehemiah Cohen came to visit Sabbatai in the fortress. In accordance with the theological argument of a “double messiah,” he argued that he was, in fact, the first messiah, coming as he did from the house of Joseph, who was assumed to have come before the messiah from the House of David, and urged Sabbatai to acknowledge him as such. Sabbatai was not convinced and rejected his offer. Perhaps out of revenge, Nehemya went to Edirne and there converted to Islam. While there he warned the Ottoman authorities about Sabbatai, complaining that he was causing a major social and religious upheaval among the Jews and the Muslims. He then disappeared from history. Another strong accusation against Sabbatai was added by a certain sheikh, named Mahmud, who was not happy to see the Jews honoring and respecting Sabbatai excessively. With other witnesses, he went to Edirne and lodged a complaint about him to the kaimmakam.⁸⁵

Either because of the complaints from the local people or because of petitions from the Jews and foreigners, the matter was brought to the attention of the Imperial Divan once again. An imperial order was sent, summoning Sabbatai to appear at the Edirne Palace. In the presence of the sultan he was tried and given the choice of converting to Islam or facing execution on September 16, 1666. His choice of converting to Islam transformed the movement into an underground sect. Before we examine the conversion moment in detail, we need to answer the important question of what exactly was the size and effect of the movement during its heyday.

⁸⁴ The punishment of exile could be implemented in different forms in the seventeenth century. It could be *nefy-i belde*, *hab*, or *kürek*. *Nefy-i belde* means that the wrongdoer is exiled to a town, as long as she or he does not leave the town, the punishment is fulfilled.

⁸⁵ Arakel, *Book of History*, 559.

London: Dissemination and Magnitude of the Movement in the Eurasian World

In the early days of the Sabbatean outbreak in Izmir in the fall of 1665, Mehmet IV was traveling from Edirne to Istanbul. Before entering the city, the sultan asked the kaimmakam to give a report about the city. He replied: “Everyone is at peace and comfort and they continue praying for the Sultan.”⁸⁶ According to this statement, there seems to have been no sign of the Sabbatean hysteria in the imperial capital by the fall.

The common assumption about the magnitude and impact of the movement, mostly originating from narrative sources, was that the world Jewry, including the communities of both the Ottoman Empire and Europe, were overwhelmed by the Sabbatean euphoria during its heyday. Based on that assumption, many Ottomanists and Jewish scholars thought that the movement had a major destructive impact on the already declining Jewish communities.

Examining the Ottoman context of the movement forces us to revise some of these assumptions. First, the movement was not as big in the Ottoman Empire as it was in Europe. Second, the impact of the movement did not pose a major threat to the fate of Ottoman Jewry. Why was the Sabbatean movement perceived to have been as such in modern scholarship, then? Earlier responses to this question focused on Christian millenarian expectations, which calculated that the coming of the messiah and the end of time would occur in the year 1666. Such expectations, it was argued, built up a massive messianic expectation in Europe and, that coupled with Jewish messianic expectations, fueled the rapid dissemination of the Sabbatean movement in Europe.

In challenging this argument, Richard Popkin,⁸⁷ for example, claimed that seventeenth-century Europeans and, following them, many modern researchers were misled by the writings of contemporaneous Christian observers of the movement, such as English royalists Paul Rycaut and John Evelyn, who deliberately magnified the success and failure of the movement in order to both ridicule the Jews and to dash the expectations of home-grown non-conformist millenarians.⁸⁸ Without refuting the validity of this explanation, I think that there was yet another factor behind the rapid dissemination of the movement in Europe, particularly among millenarian circles in the Reformed countries: the prophecies of “the doom of the Turkish empire.” According to an age-old Christian prophecy, there was an inherent connection between Christian millenarianism and Jewish messianic expectations. Jews were

⁸⁶ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 67a.

⁸⁷ Popkin, “Three English Tellings of the Sabbathai Zevi Story,” *Jewish History* 8 (1994), 46.

⁸⁸ John Evelyn made it clear in his introduction that he first wanted to show how foolish the Jews have been, and second, and more important, to undermine confidence in the English millenarians of the time. Evelyn, *History of the Three Late Famous Impostors, Padro Ottomano, Mahamed Bei and Sabbathai Sevi* (London: Printed for Henry Herringman, 1669).

supposed to convert to Christianity and then return to the Holy Land before the Second Coming of Jesus.⁸⁹ And the notorious date of 1666 was calculated as the date for the rise of the Antichrist—the Jewish Messiah. Ironically, the Christian Mary was seen as a supreme she-devil, demonic counterpart to the presence of God, the *Shekhina*, according to some Kabbalistic traditions in those times. There was one “stumbling block” to realizing this project in its entirety. The Holy Land was under Turkish rule in those days, and it was supposed to be redeemed from Turkish hands. A Jewish messiah, or Antichrist, arising from the East was seen as a sign on the way to the fulfillment of the prophecy. In other words, Sevi, coming from the East, would bring an end to the “Turkish menace,” which had posed a threat to European ambitions for centuries, leading to the redemption of the Holy Land and preparation of the Jews for conversion to Christianity. Seventeenth-century books of Christian prophecy are filled with this account of the connection between Turkish doom, Jewish conversion, and Christian salvation, as reflected in the following quotation.

Turks running over all nations, as a Plague (*following Antichrist*) upon the Christian world. God hath purposed to destroy [Turks] utterly; that the way of the kings of the EAST mighty be prepared. By the *king* of the *East*, we are to understand the Jews who are called Kings. . . . The way that is to be prepared for the Jews is two-fold. *First*, their conversion and, *second*, for their return unto their own Land, by taking the *stumbling-block* out of their way. The Papists are a very great stumbling block unto the conversion of the *Jews*; and the *Turks* are a great impediment unto their return unto their own Land, unto which God hath promised to bring them.⁹⁰

Influenced by these kinds of millenarian and royalist writings, most narrative sources agree that the movement brought chaos to the commerce and daily affairs of the empire. For example, Rycaut writes that “millions of people were possessed when Sabbatai first appeared in Smyrna . . . and there was a strange transport in the Jews, none of them attending any business . . . and to prepare themselves and families for a journey to Jerusalem.”⁹¹ A Venetian observer informs his audience that “Jews of Smyrna abandoned commerce and their daily life. Jews of Istanbul were talking about nothing but establishing their own kingdom, overthrowing all other monarchies.”⁹² Henry Finch, who belonged to millenarian-philosemitic circles in England, reported to London from Florence in April 1666 that many Jews came to Livorno in order to go to the Promised Land. Echoing Rycaut, Giovanni Marrana’s fictional character

⁸⁹ David Ruderman “Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Exile and Diaspora* (Jerusalem: Ben Zwi, 1991), 185–202.

⁹⁰ Handerd Knollys, *Apocalyptic Mysteries* (London: n.p., 1667), 26–27.

⁹¹ Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 174.

⁹² “Lettera Mandata Da Constanpoli.”

states that “no trading or commerce goes forward among them; a universal Stop is put to all Business.”⁹³ In the meantime, one of his friends, Henry Oldenburg, was asking Spinoza whether he heard anything about the Sabbatean movement. Unfortunately, we do not know his reply.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, narratives about the movement were produced and reproduced in many European languages. Voltaire, for example, wrote that Constantinople Jews cancelled all debts and refused to pay their creditors.

The English merchants at Galata waited upon Sabbatai in jail and told him that as king of the Jews, he ought to command all his subjects to pay their debts. Sabbatai wrote the following words to the persons complained against: To you, who expect the salvation of Jerusalem, discharge your lawful debts; if you refuse it, you shall not enter with us into our joy, and into our Empire.⁹⁴

Modern scholars have been captivated by these dramatic depictions of the movement, and have assumed that the Sabbatean fervor swept equally over all of world Jewry. This assumption certainly requires some qualification. First, it seems that the “Jewish messiah” created more excitement among the Christians than the Jews in Christendom, and ironically, Christian interest in the Jewish messiah fueled the already existing Jewish interest in him. Second, Ottoman Jewry was less affected by the movement, for there was not a strong millenarian movement in the Ottoman Empire that could fuel Jewish interest. The last major outbreak of Islamic millenarian fervor took place in the 1570s, but as attested to by many Ottoman authors such as Katip Çelebi and Naima, it had long since faded by the time of the Sabbatean movement.⁹⁵ Therefore, the lack of millennial preoccupation among the eastern Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the empire was one of the main reasons that explain the difference in magnitude of messianic fervor between Christendom and Islamdom.

What was the level of participation in the messianic movement among the Ottoman Jews then? The conventional answer to this question was that nearly all Ottoman Jews were attracted by the messianic call and readied themselves to go to the Holy Land. The Ottoman Jews were urban people, and their population was estimated at 150,000–200,000 souls in the mid-seventeenth century. Had all of them—or even a sizable majority—been involved in the movement, daily life would have been paralyzed in the major cities of the empire, for economic transactions would have ceased, debts and tax payments

⁹³ Giovanni Marana, *Letters Written by a Turkish Spy Who Lived Five and Forty Years (1659–1682)*, 8 vols. (London: Printed by J. Leake, 1680), VI: 241.

⁹⁴ Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History*, IV: 269.

⁹⁵ The 1570s correspond to the year 1000 in the Islamic calendar. For the Islamic millenarians, see Cornell Fleisher, “Mahdi and Millennium: Messianic Dimensions in the Development of Ottoman Imperial Ideology,” in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization*, ed. H. İnalçik et al. (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), III: 42–54.

could have been stopped, properties sold, slaves manumitted, and the like. One could expect to find traces of this commotion in the Ottoman archival and court documents, produced by one of the most bureaucratic-minded document-loving empires in world history.

In order to find traces of messianic activity among the Ottoman Jews, I examined the Ottoman chronicles, court registers, and archival documents, placed in the collections of Mühimme Defterleri, Şikayet Defterleri, Ruus Defterleri, Maliyeden Müdevver Defterleri, Ahkam Defterleri, Hatti Humayun, Kamil Kepeci, Ali Emiri, and Ibni'l Emin. Except for the chronicles, none of these sources yielded a direct reference to the movement. The paucity of the documents was a strong indication that the movement had not been as widespread and destructive as has been assumed. In the absence of documents, I designed a simple model to assess the amount of upheaval and dislocation among Ottoman Jews. For that, I systematically analyzed all the court records of Hasköy, and selective court records of major Istanbul towns—Edirne, Karaferye, and Rumeli Kazaskerliği—from the seventeenth century. They are altogether forty-four court registries (*defter*), which include thousands of court cases.⁹⁶ I cross checked the yielded results with other Ottoman sources.

I focused on Hasköy since it was the largest Jewish settlement in Istanbul in the second half of the seventeenth century. We do not have an exact figure for Hasköy's Jewish population, but from Evliya Çelebi we learn that there were about eleven Jewish neighborhoods, in addition to two Greek neighborhoods, one Armenian, and one Muslim neighborhood. Çelebi says that "Hasköy was as overfilled with Jews as the cities of Salonica and Safed."⁹⁷ Heyd confirms that there were eleven Jewish congregations in the town.⁹⁸ From the court records we learn that those neighborhoods were embedded in seven major neighborhoods.⁹⁹ The ratio of the sultanic tax imposed on the Hasköy population makes it clear that the number of Jews was much higher than the sum total of Muslims, Christians, and Armenians in the town.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁶ In addition to sixteen Hasköy court registries, the other court registries, which are housed in İstanbul Şer'iyye Sicilleri Arşivi (İSSA) are İstanbul Bab # 1 & 2 (1076–8/1665–7); Üsküdar #246&247 (1076–8/1665–7); Galata # 96, 979, 899, 100 (1075–8/1665–7); Eyüp #76, 77 (1075–8/1665–7); Beşiktaş # 76, 77 (1075–8/1665–7); Edirne # 46, 47, 48 (1075–8/1665–7); Karaferye # 1, 2, 3, (1070–1080/1660–1670); Rumeli Sadaret # 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123 (1076–1088/1665–1677). I did not include the Izmir, Salonica, and Jerusalem court records from the seventeenth century, since the Izmir and Salonica ones from this period are not extant, and the Jerusalem registries have already been studied by Amnon Cohen, Minna Rozen, and Dror Zwi, who could not find a trace of Sabbateanism.

⁹⁷ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, I: 175–176.

⁹⁸ Heyd, "The Jewish Communities of Istanbul."

⁹⁹ They are Südlüce, Abdusselam, Turşucu, Piri Pasha, Kiremitçi, Elhac Şaban, and Keçeci neighborhoods. See İSSA Hasköy # 14/33b.

¹⁰⁰ A Sultanic decree in 1679 suggests that Jews constituted almost 60 percent of the Hasköy population. See İSSA Hasköy #10/33 and 14/33.

Hasköy neighborhood, therefore, should have been the first place to detect the repercussions of the messianic activity.

The seventeenth century Hasköy records, totaling sixteen egistries, yielded about 800 cases related to Jewish affairs.¹⁰¹ In these entries, Jews appear as both plaintiffs and defendants against Jews, Muslims, and Christians. As can be seen in the following tables, the cases are mostly about inheritance, property transactions, taxation, divorce, debt, and rarely about religious and communal or criminal affairs. These records also show that the Jews began using the Ottoman courts increasingly as they became more and more Ottomanized.

To compare the social and economic status of the Ottoman Jews before and after the Sabbatean movement, I have divided the Hasköy records into four periods. The first period covers 1600 to 1660 (Table 2.1), the second, 1660 to 1670 (Table 2.2), the third, 1665 to 1666 (Table 2.3), and the fourth, 1670 to 1700 (Table 2.4). The most significant result that emerged from the longitudinal data extrapolated from the documents is that there was no significant change in the daily lives of Ottoman Jews during the apex of the movement. There is no indication of an extraordinary increase in criminal affairs, or of upheaval or displacement in the mid-1660s. It seems that Ottoman Jews approached the movement very cautiously and did not disrupt their daily lives by selling all their valuables, or by ceasing to perform their

TABLE 2.1 Hasköy Court Records 1600–1660

	JEW VS. JEW	JEW VS. MUSLIM	MUSLIM VS. JEW	JEW VS. DHIMMI	DHIMMI VS. JEW	TOTAL # OF CASES
Property	19	11	11	3	3	47
Debt	20	17	5	7	22	71
Female Slave	7 + 4					13
Kitabet/Itak						
Conversion						4
Divorce	4					4
Inheritance						7
Tax						3
Neighbors	5	6	5	1		12
<i>Waqf</i>						4
Crime						18
Other						36
Total	48	34	16	10	25	219

¹⁰¹ I worked on these records in collaboration with Yaron Ben-Naeh who was planning to publish a summary of them in English.

TABLE 2.2 Hasköy Court Records 1660–1670

	JEW VS. JEW	JEW VS. MUSLIM	MUSLIM VS. JEW	JEW VS. DHIMMI	DHIMMI VS. -JEW	TOTAL # OF CASES
Property	2	2	2			4
Debt	3	2	3			5
Female Slave	33 + 4					7
Kitabet/Itak						
Conversion						4
Divorce		2				2
Inheritance						7
Tax						0
Neighbors			2			2
<i>Waqf</i>			5			5
Crime						9
Other						7
Total	14	11				48

TABLE 2.3 Hasköy Court Records 1665–1666

	JEW VS. JEW	JEW VS. MUSLIM	MUSLIM VS. JEW	JEW VS. DHIMMI	DHIMMI VS. JEW	TOTAL # OF CASES
Property		1				1
Debt						0
Female Slave	0 + 2					2
Kitabet/Itak						
Conversion						0
Divorce						0
Inheritance						2
Tax						0
Neighbors			1			1
<i>Waqf</i>						0
Crime						1
Other						3
Total	3	1				10

civic duties for the state. Had many of them stopped paying their debts, manumitted their slaves, or sold their real estate during the height of the movement, for instance, this would have been reflected in the court records, since all real estate activities were supposed to be notarized by the local authorities.

TABLE 2.4 Hasköy Court Records 1670–1700

	JEW VS. JEW	JEW VS. MUSLIM	MUSLIM VS. JEW	JEW VS. DHIMMI	DHIMMI VS. JEW	TOTAL # CASES
Property	40	14	9	1		64
Debt	73	72	12	11	11	179
Female Slaves	49 + 33		1			84
Kitabet/Itak						
Conversion						15
Divorce		10				10
Inheritance						21
Tax						26
Neighbors	3	7	3	1		14
<i>Waqf</i>	6	5	7			13
Crime						55
Other						45
Total	176	93	26	12	11	526

As the figures in the tables reveal, between 1600 and 1660, 219 cases appeared at the Hasköy court, and 22 percent of them were related to property transactions, 32 percent to debts, and 6 percent to buying or manumitting female slaves. Between 1660 and 1670, 48 cases appeared, of which only 10 were recorded in 1665–1666, the time when the Sabbatean movement was at its peak. Between 1670 and 1700, 525 cases appeared in the court. The number of cases almost doubled in the second half of the seventeenth century, in part because many Jews moved to Hasköy after the fire of 1660, in part because court registration became more systematic and common, and in part because the Jews developed a new Ottoman Jewish culture. In this period, 12 percent of the cases were related to property transactions, 34 percent to debts, and 16 percent to female slaves. Moreover, the decade between 1660 and 1670 simply confirms the longer trend. An interesting development in this part of the century was an increasing number of court cases in which both sides were Jewish.

This result is confirmed by cross-referencing the data from the Istanbul, Edirne, and Rumeli Kazaskerliği courts. If the abandonment of daily affairs or worldly possessions was indeed accompanying the messianic fervor of the Sabbatean movement, one could expect to find some traces of this, particularly in the tax registries for Rumeli Kazaskerliği, which cover the entire European part of the empire.

The same conclusion holds true for the extensive Ottoman archival records. Aside from the chronicles, I was able to identify few archival

documents from the seventeenth century about Sevi and his movement. None of them, however, reveal anything about the magnitude of the movement. Therefore, these sources and (lack thereof) suggest that the scale of the movement was smaller in the empire than has been previously assumed. The paucity of Jewish sources written in the Ottoman lands corroborates this conclusion.¹⁰²

In all fairness, it could not have been easy to mobilize thousands of Ottoman and non-Ottoman subjects within the empire for practical reasons. It is assumed that Jews from far and away came to visit the messiah in great numbers. As the famous opening sentence of Rycaut's accounts goes, there was a “big transportation” of Jews from all over the world toward the Ottoman Empire. However, the assumption that they crossed the Ottoman borders in large groups simply cannot have been true, since foreigners who wanted to travel within the Ottoman empire needed a visa-like document, called a *berat* or *buyruldu*. This document would have to first be approved by Ottoman authorities and then shown at all possible stations on the way to the final destination. Not only international travelers but domestic travelers also needed to have proper documents to travel from one place to another within the empire.¹⁰³ It would be unimaginable for the Ottomans to issue thousands of “visas” for non-Ottoman visitors. This constitutes further proof that the magnitude of the movement was not as great in the empire as has been assumed.¹⁰⁴ The curious thing here whether the Ottoman authorities allowed some of the Europeans to come visit Sabbatai Sevi with the purpose of spying on and gathering information about the European powers, a practice that the Ottomans were good at since the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁵ In passing, it is not an exaggeration to say that had we examined not only narrative sources but also archival records in Europe, we might have revised our assumptions about the impact of the movement in Christendom as well.

For most of the students of Ottoman-Jewish studies, the failure of the Sabbatean movement was a major reason for the decline of Ottoman Jewry. Rosanes's evaluation of the movement, in the spirit of the French Alliance Israelite of which he was a student, became almost a canonical in the field: “Then all the glory was taken away from Turkish Jewry, never to return . . . on

¹⁰² Victor Weissberg, “Jewish Life in Seventeenth Century Turkey as Reflected in the Responsa of Rabbi Jacob Alfandri and Rabbi Joseph Katzavi,” Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (Hebrew Union College, 1990). Weissberg tells that *responsa* give us insight into the economic life of the seventeenth century Jews, but nowhere mention Sevi. Nor do they reflect any decline in Jewish economic activity after the Sabbatean movement or cloud of suspicion under which Jews lived because of the Port’s suspicion. p. 196.

¹⁰³ For a seventeenth century *berat* examples, see the one granted to a French envoy in Izmir in 1673. BOA, Ali Emiri # 4738.

¹⁰⁴ For further discussion on the subject, see Sisman, “Global Crisis, Puritanism and Prophecy.”

¹⁰⁵ For the Ottoman spying activities and diplomacy, see Emrah Safa Gürkan, “Espionage in the 16th century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean go-betweens and the Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry” Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2012).

all sides there was retrogression and a change for the worse . . . all these scenes were caused by the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi and his band of prophets.”¹⁰⁶

The declinist approach assumes that the movement had a “destructive impact” on the already declining Jewish communities in two important ways: first, it undermined the Jewish position within the Ottoman system, since the Jews lost their credibility in the eyes of the Ottomans; and second, it contributed to an unprecedented reinforcement of rabbinical power, which was said to be an obstacle to possible progressive developments.¹⁰⁷

These views are greatly exaggerated by Jewish historians who focused primarily on the rising Jewish communities of Europe.¹⁰⁸ There is no doubt that the Ottoman Jews were seriously challenged by economic and political uncertainty and disruptions, which created an atmosphere, conducive to a messianic call. But, as discussed later, there was not a substantial change in the status of the Ottoman Jews immediately after the Sabbatean movement. For example, Tobias Cohen, Israel Koenigland, and Daniel Fonseka, who also served as Ottoman diplomats, had been appointed as palace doctors at the end of the century.

Still, the Sabbataean movement created enough trouble in the empire that Sabbatai was arrested, put in prison, and then brought to Edirne to be put on trial.

Edirne: The Messiah Convicted

While his followers were expecting the inauguration of the messianic age, Sabbatai was brought to Edirne on the charge of sedition on September 14, 1666.¹⁰⁹ Visiting Edirne in those days, a French priest, Robert de Dreux, relates that he saw several Jews parading on the streets. Some of them were carrying shovels, spades, and other tools. When he asked them what those tools were for, they replied that they were going to fix the roads on which the messiah was going to walk.¹¹⁰

Like other criminals awaiting for trial at the Divan, Sabbatai was most likely held in the Kapiarasi¹¹¹ at the Edirne Palace for a few days. On the same day, the twenty-six-year-old sultan was suffering from a high fever, and because of that the Mevlit celebration (in commemoration of the Prophet Muhammed’s birthday) was postponed to a later date.¹¹² Two days before Sabbatai’s trial, the

¹⁰⁶ Rosanes, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael*, IV: 435.

¹⁰⁷ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 147.

¹⁰⁸ Levy, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 74.

¹⁰⁹ De la Croix, *Mémoires*, 372.

¹¹⁰ Robert Dreux, *Voyage en Turquie et en Grèce (1665–1669)* (Paris: Société d’édition, 1925), 40–42.

¹¹¹ The Kapiarasi functioned as a short-term prison for those who were waiting for trials at the Divan. It was located next to the gate of Babüsselam in the Topkapi Palace and Bab-i Hümayun in the Edirne Palace. Rifat Osman, *Edirne Sarayı* (Ankara: TTK, 1957), 64.

¹¹² Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 79a. The Mevlit was postponed until September 20, four days after Sevi’s trial.

sultan's illness got worse. The ark bearing the *hirka-yı şerif* (the Mantle of the Prophet) was opened so that the sultan could touch his face to the garment and thereby receive blessing and healing from it. Vani Efendi was with the sultan all the time, praying for the restoration of his health. Once the sultan felt well, a palace meeting on Thursday, 17 Rebiulevvel 1077 (September 16, 1666) was held to settle Sabbatai's fate.

It is not entirely clear whether the trial took place during the usual Divan meeting or whether the sultan was involved in the trial. Sheikhulislam Minkarizade Yahya Efendi, Vani Efendi, and Kaimmakam Kara Mustafa Pasha were all present during the trial. The grand vizier was absent, since he was out on campaign in Crete. Meanwhile, Sabbatai's followers were camped outside, anxiously awaiting news of the outcome, and most probably expecting their messiah to convert the sultan to his cause.

Abdi relates that the trial took place in the Yeniköşk, New Palace, and that the sultan "watched and listened to [the meeting] discreetly from the window." The interrogation was carried out by Vani Efendi, the sheikhulislam and the kaimmakam. Another version of Abdi's manuscript reads that the sultan "watched and gazed" (*seyr ve temşa*) instead of "watched and listened" (*seyr ü istima*) to the trial.¹¹³ Both of the accounts suggest that the sultan was attentively monitoring the trial. Another court historian, Silahtar tells that the trial took place in the Hasoda, or Privy Chamber, rather than the Yeniköşk, and the sultan was watching in secret and listening to the trial.¹¹⁴ Neither the Yeniköşk nor the Hasoda were traditional places for the Divan meetings.

Sabbatean observers have speculated about the nature of the sultan's involvement ever since. Very rich and colorful narratives about this scene, mostly based on rumor, made their way into the recorded accounts, especially those of foreign observers. Arakel writes that "the sultan sat in Judgment."¹¹⁵ Rycart too believes that the sultan was personally involved in the trial. His account is one of the earliest ones to capture the main elements of the European perception of the Sabbatean affair:

Being demanded several questions in Turkish by the Grand Seignior, he would not trust so far to the virtue of his Messiahship, as to deliver himself in Turkish, but desired a Doctor of Physick (who had from a Jew turned Turk) to be his interpreter . . . the Grand Signor would not be put off without a Miracle, and it must be one of his own choosing; which was, that Sabbatai would be stripped naked, and set as a mark to his dexterous Archers; if the arrows passed not his body, but that his flesh and skin was proof, like Armour, then he would believe him to be the Messiah. . . . But now Sabbatai not having Faith enough to stand to so sharp a trial, renounced all his Title of Kingdoms and Governments, alleging that he

¹¹³ Çetin Derin, "Abdi Paşa Vekayinamesi: Tahlil ve Metin," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (Istanbul University, 1993), 215.

¹¹⁴ Silahtar, *Silahtar Tarihi*, I: 431.

¹¹⁵ Arakel, *Book of History*, 560.

was an ordinary Cocham and Jew. . . . His treason and crime could not be expiated without becoming a Mahometan Convert: which if he refused to do, the Stake was ready at the Gate of the Seraglio to impale him. . . . Replied with much cheerfulness that he was contented to turn Turk, and that it was not of force, but of choice, having been a long time desirous of so glorious a profession, he esteemed himself much honored that he had an opportunity to own it first in the presence of the Grand Seignior.¹⁶

Dönme tradition accepts the sultanic involvement in the trial as well. According to this tradition, during the trial, Sabbatai's religious knowledge was challenged by such questions as "What is the nature of soul?" "Did Muhammad ascend to heaven in body or in soul?" and "What did Moses tell Muhammad during his ascension?" As Sabbatai answered these questions with textual evidence from the Qur'an, scholars in the meetings admonished him saying "you know all of these and yet you are still not a Muslim?" Before any harm was done to him, the sultan intervened, and made him convert to Islam.¹⁷

If we know the nature of Divan meetings, we may surmise that the sultanic intervention in the trial was plausible. The Divan is the name given to the Ottoman imperial council, which met in Kubbealtı, one of the central halls of the palace. The meetings covered all the state affairs, including fiscal, military, political, religious, and international issues. Although these meetings had a long tradition reaching back to the ancient Turkic and Islamic polities, it took on its definitive shape during the reign of Mehmet II (1432–1482). Mehmet II was also the first to give up the role of presiding over the meetings and relinquishing this function to the grand vizier. Instead, he would monitor the proceedings from behind a screen or lattice. This became a sultanic tradition. Unlike other sultans, Mehmet IV spent most of his time at the Edirne Palace; thus most of the meetings were held there. Dr. Covel gives us a colorful description of the meeting place and the lattice at this palace:

The Grand Court (Divanhane) was the same one as we saw in Istanbul, a couch covered with a silk cloth embroidered with gold and silver and with precious carpets. There was a footstool in front of the couch and this was covered by a very beautiful embroidered fabric. . . . Next to the couch was standing the grand vizier. Behind him there was a caged window, as it was also in Istanbul and we all knew that the sultan was sitting behind this window.¹⁸

In the sixteenth century the Divan met four times per week, and in the seventeenth century only twice.¹⁹ A close reading of Abdi's chronicle, which recorded the events on a daily basis, reveals that the Divan met regularly on

¹⁶ Rycart, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 181.

¹⁷ Arif Oruç, "Dönmeliç Nasıl Çıktı?" *Son Saat*, August 3, 1927.

¹⁸ Dr. Covel's Diary, 190.

¹⁹ Ahmet Mumcu, "Divan-ı Hümeyyun," DIA, 431.

Tuesdays and irregularly on Sundays and Wednesdays.¹²⁰ The fact that Sevi's trial took place on Thursday, that the trial did not take place in the Kubbealtı hall, and that Vani Efendi and the kaimmamak, who were at the trial, were not regular members of the Divan, proves that the trial did not take place in a regular Divan meeting.¹²¹ Therefore it was entirely possible that the trial took place in an irregular meeting where the sultan could directly intervene. Considering Mehmed IV's zeal for converting non-Muslims, one could think it quite plausible that the sultan would be directly involved in the trial.¹²²

Spain and Portuguese: The Marrano Impact on the Movement

During the trial, Sabbatai must have had a hard time explaining himself. He knew some Turkish, since he was smart and born in Ottoman society and lived in the empire for forty years. However, he may not have been sufficiently fluent to pursue a legal/political argument during the trial. One of the palace physicians, Hayatizade Mustafa Efendi, a Jewish convert originally known as Moshe ben Abravanel, would have been the obvious choice to serve as interpreter. Although the earlier Ottoman chroniclers did not mention his name, both Jewish and Turkish scholars, such as Graetz, Molho, Rosanes, Galante, Scholem, Gövsa, and Küçük, agree that a physician took part in the conversion episode. Rycaut recounts that Sabbatai asked "the Doctor of Physick" whom he knew before the trial, to be his interpreter. De la Croix,¹²³ Arakel,¹²⁴ and Kömürcüyan, contemporaries of Sabbatai, give his name as Hayatizade:

A man, who was known as Hayatizade, and who himself was a Jewish convert, came and talked to Sabbatai. After describing the gravity of what is going to happen to him, he said: Since you have caused anarchy and chaos in the Empire, the sultan asked his men to kill you. If you are a miracle worker, then save yourself, and do it now, so that you can save yourself and your people!¹²⁵

A Jewish report that was penned just a few months after the trial confirms that "a certain physician intervened, who had formerly been a Jew himself, but who had been forcibly converted at the sultan's orders."¹²⁶ Among Jewish

¹²⁰ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname* (Tuesday Meeting) 77b, (Sunday Meeting) 80b, (Wednesday Meeting) 103b.

¹²¹ The Divan had essential and auxiliary members. The essentials members were the grand vizier, the Kubbealtı viziers, the *Kadiaskers* of Rumeli and Anatolia, the *Defterdars* of both Rumeli and Anatolia, and the *Nışancıs*. For Divan meetings, see Hezarfen Hüseyin, *Telhisul Beyan fi Kavanini Ali Osman* (Ankara: TTK, 1998).

¹²² For conversion cases where Mehmed IV directly involved in, see Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 179–205.

¹²³ De la Croix, *Memoires*, 372.

¹²⁴ Arakel, *Book of History*, 560.

¹²⁵ Kömürcüyan, "Sabatay Sevi Hakkında Ermenice Bir Şiir," 45.

¹²⁶ "An early Report of Sabbatai Sevi's Apostasy, November 1666." Cited in Sasportas, *Tsitsat novel Tsevi*. 169–174.

authors only Tobias Cohen, who himself was a doctor at the Ottoman palace at the end of the seventeenth century, gives his Turkish name: M[H]ayatizade.¹²⁷ In *Vain Expectations of the Jews* of Thomas Coenen, who was, a Dutch Evangelical preacher in Izmir, and followed Sabbatean affair closely until 1671, the physician appears to be a Jewish convert by the name of Gidon.¹²⁸ Likewise in an extant fragment of the Sabbatean manuscript, the physician's name is Isaac Zafiri, who was described as "a great sage, especially in physics. He was forced by the sultan to apostatize, and this was God's doing in order that he might save the Jewish nation."¹²⁹

The nature of Hayatizade's involvement in the case is still unclear.¹³⁰ He was born into a Marrano family and raised and educated in the Ottoman and Jewish cultural milieu. He was so talented in medicine that he attracted the attention of the palace. Under the auspices of the queen mother, Hatice Turhan, he converted to Islam, took on the name Hayatizade, and became one of the members of the royal medical team.¹³¹ In relating the episode of Abravanel's conversion, Kürt Hatip relates that although he was a uniquely talented doctor working at the palace, he was not converted to Islam immediately.¹³² It seems that he relinquished or was "forced" to convert to Islam to maintain his position at the palace. At the time of Sabbatai's trial, Hayatizade was still a regular doctor, not yet promoted to the position of chief physician that he would assume in 1669.¹³³

The complex relationship between the Marranos and Sabbatai has already been demonstrated by scholars such as Scholem, Yerushalmi, and Barnai. With some important differences (such as the latter's antinomian tendencies), when one compares how both movements marked birth, marriage, and death, which were key occasions for reaffirming their basic beliefs, the parallels between the Marranos and Sabbateans are quite striking. From the late Middle Ages onward, the Marrano experience became an intrinsic part of Jewish collective memory, and the legacy was transmitted to the Jewish communities of North Africa, Europe, and the Ottoman Empire. After Amsterdam and the Italian cities, Salonica, Istanbul, and Izmir became the major centers for Marranos who reconverted to Judaism.¹³⁴ The Marranos had their

¹²⁷ Tobias Cohen, "Ma'aresh Tobiah," in *Zoth Torath ha-Qena'oth* (Jerusalem: 1970. Reprint of Amsterdam, 1752), 46.

¹²⁸ Coenen, *Shabtai Tsevi*, 81. For this one of the most important eye-witness account of the Sabbatean movement, see Gerbern Oegema, "Thomas Coenen's "Ydele Verwachtinge der Joden" Amersterdam, 1669) as an Important Source for the History of Sabbatai Sevi," in *Jewish Studies between the Disciplines*, ed. by Peter Schafer and Hermann Klaus (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 331–353.

¹²⁹ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 675–676

¹³⁰ Baer, "17. Yüzyılda Yahudilerin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Nüfuz ve Mevkilerini Yitirmeleri."

¹³¹ Silahtar, *Silahtar Tarihi*, II: 291.

¹³² *Risale-i Kürt Hatip* (Topkapı Sarayı, MS, Eski Hazine 1400), 18b-19b.

¹³³ He was appointed as Hekimbaşı in 1669, when Salih Efendi the Hekimbaşı died. Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 102a

¹³⁴ For Marrano history and practices David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996).

own theologies—often a mixture of Jewish eschatological and Christian millenarian ideas in Europe, especially with regard to the coming of the messiah. There is no doubt that Sabbatai was familiar with the Marrano experience, since he was from Izmir, a city that received and was replenished by the Marrano progenies. *Hope of Israel* the messianic book by Menasseh ben Israel (who was also of Marrano origin), was published in 1659 by a group of former Marranos, for example. As Barnai shows, the book's more avid readers were none other than Sabbatai himself and his close friends in Izmir.¹³⁵ Therefore, both Hayatizade and Sabbatai had exposure to the Marrano tradition.

The accounts of Hayatizade's deposition give us a hint that he might have kept his crypto-Jewish beliefs throughout his life. After a long and very successful service as the chief physician, he was removed from his office on June 23, 1691, following the accession of Ahmet II. There are two different accounts of his removal. According to the first account, he was found guilty of applying a wrong treatment to the previous sultan, Suleiman II, and thereby causing his death in 1691.¹³⁶ According to the second account, however, a group of palace physicians went to Sheikhulislam Feyzullah Efendi, and testified that Hayatizade had ceased attending the *ulema* meetings, stopped praying and fasting, and even more important, that he had been seen practicing some of the Jewish rituals and befriending Jewish people. When the news reached the new sultan, he at first did not believe in this "betrayal" and told them that the physician-in-chief could be deposed only if he had improperly treated the previous sultan. Upon the insistence of the other *ulema*, however, the sultan finally fired his physician. This account is based on the testimony of the chief historian, Silahtar, who witnessed all those events and was most probably familiar with all the parties involved, so this account seems the more reliable of the two.¹³⁷ Thus, it seems that Hayatizade practiced a form of crypto-Judaism at the end of his life, if not throughout. He was simply a forced—and, apparently, not particularly enthusiastic—convert who seems to have retained or at least reverted to observing some Jewish practices in his later years.

Being a "forced convert" himself, Hayatizade seems to have played a role in Sabbatai's conversion merely by virtue of his presence at the palace, if not by his active encouragement; and he transmitted some of the Marrano practices and ideas to Sabbatai. After the conversion of Sabbatai, the relationship, or, rather, friendship, between the two courtiers could have continued during the very time in which Sabbateanism became a sectarian movement.

¹³⁵ Jacob Barnai, "Christian Messianism and the Portuguese Marranos: The Emergence of Sabbateanism in Smyrna," *Jewish History* (Fall 1993): 119–126.

¹³⁶ Sari Mehmet Pasha, *Zubde-i Vekayiat* (1656–1704), ed. A. Özcan (Ankara: TTK, 1995), 398. According to this account, he was imprisoned in Yedikule, died a year after in 1692, and buried in the Edirnekapi cemetery.

¹³⁷ Silahtar, *Silahtar Tarihi*, II: 578.

Sultan's Palace: "Become a Muslim or Prepare to Die!"

Toward the end of the trial, the interrogators asked Sabbatai to embrace Islam or to be prepared to die. He had come to the palace with the initial aim of converting the sultan but now found himself facing death. What should he have done? Coming from a Sephardic background, steeped in the rabbinic tradition, and familiar with the Marrano experience, he was no doubt well aware of the Jewish attitude to apostasy and martyrdom. When he had to choose between martyrdom and conversion, he chose life, for this act could be justified by the Sephardic tradition. Had he been of the Askenazi origin, his inner dilemma may well have been much more serious.¹³⁸

The issue of conversion and martyrdom in Judaism is very complex. It is technically impossible for a Jew to change his or her Jewishness. As far as the Jewish law, *halakha*, is concerned, even though a Jew undergoes the rites of admission to another religious faith and formally renounces the Jewish religion she or he remains a Jew, albeit a sinner (*Talmud: Sanhedrin*, 44a). One, of course, should make a distinction between a voluntary and a forced conversion. The voluntary converts are known as *mumar* (from the root meaning “to change”), or *meshummad* (from the root meaning “to persecute or force abandonment of faith”), or *apikoros* (“heretic”), or *kofer* (“denier”), or *poshe'a Yisrael* (“‘transgressor’ Jew”).¹³⁹ The forced converts, as in the case of the Marranos, are called *anusim*. “What was to happen when an idolater forced an Israelite to transgress one of the commandments of the Torah on pain of death?” asks the *Mishna Torah* of Maimonides. The answer to that question is clear: “He transgressed and did not suffer death because it was said of the commandments that when a man performed them he must live and not die. (*Leviticus* 18:5). If he is killed and did not transgress, he is guilty of his own life.”¹⁴⁰ However there are exceptions in transgression as is seen in Maimonides’s words: “To what does this word refer? To all commandments, except idolatry, immorality and bloodshed. Regarding these three, if one says ‘transgress one of them or die’ one must die and not transgress.” Since Islam is not an idolatrous religion in Maimonides’s view, it was acceptable to convert to Islam under duress, rather than choosing martyrdom.¹⁴¹

In Maimonides’s time, one of the forced converts inquired of a rabbi whether he would gain merit by observing secretly as many commandments of Judaism as he could. The rabbi gave a ruling that any Jew who had made

¹³⁸ During the time of the Crusades, for instance, the Ashkenazi Jews who fell victim to them are known to have preferred martyrdom to conversion. See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern times* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

¹³⁹ Moshe Perlmann, “Apostasy,” in *Judaica*, Online edition.

¹⁴⁰ Moses Maimonides, *The Book of Knowledge: From the Mishnah Torah of Maimonides* (Edinburgh: Royal College, 1981), 12–13.

¹⁴¹ For Maimonides’ *responsa* on Islam and Jewish converts to Islam, see Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Law* (New York: Behrman House, 1968), 181–186.

a profession of Islam would thereafter commit an additional sin with each commandment of Judaism that he performed. Horrified by this ruling, Maimonides composed his Epistle on Martyrdom to refute it and to offer what he considered more sound advice to the forced converts:

If anyone comes to ask me whether to surrender his life or acknowledge, I tell him to confess and not to choose death. However, he should not continue to live in the domain of that ruler. He should stay home and not go out, and if he is dependent on his work let him be the Jew in private.¹⁴²

Maimonides's attitude toward death, conversion, and crypto-faith shaped the Sephardic tradition on these issues. However, the convert is expected to return to his religion when the times permit. Although there was some disagreement, the common attitude among the Ottoman Jewish rabbis toward a forced convert who reverts to Judaism was that such a return required no special ritual since, technically, the convert never left it. As Shaw notes, no greater dispute arose among the Ottoman rabbis than those regarding the treatment of Marranos.¹⁴³ It seems that most Ottoman rabbis tended to allow Marranos to return to Judaism without too much consideration of their histories.¹⁴⁴ This Sephardic attitude toward forced conversion thus made Sabbatai and his believer's conversion to Islam easier. However, when some of the Dönmes wanted to return to Judaism in later centuries, the rabbis did not show the same positive attitude toward them, for, unlike the Marranos, they had in the meantime adopted several antinomian practices. Cardozo complains about them several years later as follows:

But all the other people, apart from my students who had revelations of the spirits, abandoned the Commandments. It was not enough that they wore the turban, but they transgressed the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. There was amongst them the principle that in order to bring the redemption, it is necessary to desecrate the Sabbath, to eat leavened bread on Passover, and not to accept the words of the rabbis, blessed be their memories, who speak about the divine matter.¹⁴⁵

Upon being threatened with death should he not convert, Abdi relates, Sabbatai became "immediately the recipient of the Truth," and through the intercession of the sultan, was "ennobled with the glory of Islam." The conversion of the messiah was shocking to many believers, who felt betrayed and returned to their previous lives with a feeling of profound disappointment and despair. Once the dust settled around the messiah's conversion, a few of

¹⁴² Moses Maimonides, "Epistle on Martyrdom," in *Crisis and Leadership*, ed. A. Halkin, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2009), 13–46.

¹⁴³ Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, Introduction.

¹⁴⁴ For the Ottoman rabbinical discussion on Marranos, see Morris Goodblatt, *Jewish Life in Turkey in the XVI Century as Reflected in the Legal Writings of Samuel de Medina* (New York: JTS, 1952).

¹⁴⁵ Yitzshak Molho and A. Amirillo, "Autobiographical Letters of Cardozo," [Hebrew], *Sefunot*, 3–4 (1963), 212.

his believers began to reinterpret his conversion as a sort of “holy apostasy,” a “secret mission,” deliberately undertaken with a particular mystical purpose in mind. According to them, even though the majority of Jews at the time believed that Sevi’s conversion to Islam was a cowardly act of betrayal that almost annihilated Judaism, they interpreted it rather as a necessary step in the messiah’s redemption of the world. As explained in Chapter 4, the whole point of the Holy Apostasy was *tiqqun*, not conversion. In this sense, this “holy apostasy,” like Christ’s crucifixion, was seen as the fulfillment of a messianic prophecy.

Yet for other believers, Sabbatai’s conversion to Islam was undertaken in order to forestall a wrathful action by the sultan, who in his fury wished to destroy Ottoman Jewry in its entirety. Despite the fact that his account does not fully correspond with the historical reality, the way Baruch Arezzo appropriated the event nevertheless provides valuable insight into the mental state of the believers after the apostasy: “Thus the rumor circulated that he had apostatized, and there was a great deliverance to the Jews. Our Lord made the request before the sultan on behalf of the Jews, that he reverse the letters of wrath and anger that he wrote to destroy all the Jews in Constantinople . . . and no Jew suffered any harm because of this.”¹⁴⁶ This rumor seems to have been fabricated by the Sabbatean believers who were desperately looking for an explanation for Sabbatai’s conversion. The claim that the sultan ordered all Jews to be killed is simply baseless, since that would be entirely contradictory to any known Ottoman practice. Jews were often persecuted and even forced to convert in the neighboring Safavid Empire in the mid-seventeenth century, but this communal threat had no effect on the Jews of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁷ De la Croix claims that the kaimmakam inquired of the sultan what to do with Sabbatai’s followers, and the sultan replied that “it was sufficient that their leader had shown them the way which they should take, and that he wanted to grant them a pardon for this reason.”¹⁴⁸ It is for sure, however, that the Jewish authorities were quite relieved with the ending of the messianic commotion as reflected in Istanbul rabbis letter to the Izmir Jews: “[. . .]and bless the King Sultan Mehmed, because in his days a great redemption was brought in Israel. And be not adverse to the kingdom, may God prevent it, especially all has happened.”¹⁴⁹

All the Christian and Jewish sources are skeptical about the sincerity of Sabbatai’s initial conversion. With a certain Christian agenda in mind, which

¹⁴⁶ “The Apostasy and the Faithful: From the earliest surviving life of the Messiah: Baruch of Arezzo’s Memorial to the Children of Israel (written early in the 1680s),” tr. by David Halperin, cited in Freimann, *Inyanai Sabbati Zwi*, 58.

¹⁴⁷ For the Jewish forced conversions in the Safavid Empire, see Vera B. Moreen “The Problems of Conversion among Iranian Jews in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries” *Iranian Studies*, 19/4 (1986), 215–228.

¹⁴⁸ De la Croix, *Memoires*, 374.

¹⁴⁹ Coenen, *Shabtai Tsevi*, 98. Cited in Oegema, “Thomas Coenen’s.” For another version of the letter, see chapter 3, footnote 18.

aimed to demonstrate Jewish follies, Arakel writes that Sabbatai panicked at the death threat, and “turned Mohemmedan” by saying “My blind and errant people have spread these rumors about me. . . . I am just a scholar. I have read all the books and have come to realize that only your prophet is the true prophet. . . . It is already twenty years that I have accepted him and have become a follower of his.”¹⁵⁰ Almost all travelers, missionaries, and non-Ottoman Jews, however, were of the opinion that Sabbatai and Sabbateans converted to Islam under duress, while secretly remaining loyal to their previous faith. A Dönme tradition buttresses this position, saying that when he was asked to embrace Islam on pain of death, he whispered to himself: “I convert as long as this soul (*can*) stays with me.” As soon as he went out from the presence of the sultan, he freed the bird hidden under his garment, and said: “Now the soul is released from the body.” Even today, this story is circulated among the Dönme believers.

No existing Ottoman source written before the second half of the nineteenth century casts doubt on the authenticity of Sabbatai and his followers’ conversion. As Minkov, Baer, and Kristij have all discussed, conversion to Islam was a major phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire from its inception. In the second half of the seventeenth century, as discussed in Chapter 3, frequency of conversion accelerated due to a number of political and economic factors. Next to hunting, one of the most important ambitions of Mehmet IV was to convert non-Muslims to Islam, and non-Muslim territories to Islamic territories. A few examples can be given that reveal his ambition to gain more converts to Islam. On March 11, 1665, during a hunting trip, he met a *dhimmi* shepherd, whose cow was giving birth. He watched the birth with amazement, and then inquired of the shepherd whether he was a Muslim. Upon learning that he was not a Muslim, the sultan made him an offer, that if he became a Muslim the sultan would give him land and money in this world, and God would grant him paradise hereafter.¹⁵¹ After a moment of hesitation, the shepherd converted to Islam, and the sultan granted him a post of gate-keeper, *kapıcı* at the palace, with a daily wage of 15 aspers. For comparison, just two days after the conversion of Sabbatai, on September 18, 1666, a priest converted to Islam and was given a job in the Istanbul customs house earning a wage of 25 aspers per day.¹⁵² On October 31, 1667, a captive converted to Islam and was awarded a job in the cannon factory for 50 aspers per day.¹⁵³ On November 12, 1667, one of the nobles of Georgia, a certain Mehmet, was converted in the presence of the sultan and granted a post in the imperial treasury.¹⁵⁴ Visiting Istanbul in those years, Dr. Covel relates that he saw many of

¹⁵⁰ Arakel, *Book of History*, 561.

¹⁵¹ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 57b-58a; Raşid, *Tarih-i Raşid*, I: 94–95.

¹⁵² BOA, Kepeci, Ruus 2516:115.

¹⁵³ BOA, Kepeci, Ruus 2516:120.

¹⁵⁴ BOA, I.Emin, HH, 164.

these conversions take place in the presence of the grand vizier and the sultan. Amazed by the high number of converts, he said “there were at least 200 proselytes made in these 13 days. It is our shame, for I believe all Europe have not gained so many Turks to us these 200 years.”¹⁵⁵ Galland relates another conversion episode which took place in the presence of the sultan:

On April 9, 1672, while the Sultan was on the way to the Selimiye Mosque, eleven men, three women and three children of Greek and Armenian origin who had been standing at the gate of the mosque asked the sultan to accept their conversion to Islam. They highlighted their requests by the men throwing their hats to the ground. The Sultan accepted their requests by gently nodding his head.¹⁵⁶

Such examples and other conversion cases mentioned throughout the book suggest that conversion was a frequent occurrence in the Ottoman Empire, and the converts were expected to become part of Ottoman society by adopting the new religion, language, culture, and clothing. Sabbatean converts were no exception. Therefore, as with other conversion examples, the officials did not suspect the authenticity of Sabbatean conversion in the beginning.

In addition to new clothes and money (i.e., *kisve pahasi*, price of adornment), the new Muslims could have been awarded privileged positions in accordance with their skills or social or religious standing in their former communities. Likewise, Sabbatai's worldly and spiritual merit was acknowledged by the Ottomans, and he was granted a prestigious name, Aziz Mehmed Efendi, and a position at the palace after his conversion. He was clothed in robes of honor and furs and presented with a few purses of silver; he was also granted the position of a retired middle gate officer (*kapu ortası tekaudu ile erzani buyruldu*) with a royal pension of 150 aspers per day.¹⁵⁷ The Ottoman sources are not so clear about the nature of his job, as “middle gate officer” could refer to several different generic palace posts including the Aghas of Çukadar, Hasoda, Ba-bussade, and Darussade.¹⁵⁸ Based on various evidence, however, we can interpolate that his position was that of a *kapıcıbaşı*. First, the amount of his salary was equal to other *kapıcıbaşı*s. And his salary, under the name of Mehmed, was recorded in the registries of the Retired Palace Aghas (Ağayan-ı Müteakai-din-i Enderun).¹⁵⁹ It is little wonder that Sabbatai was also called Mehmet Aga in the early days of his conversion.

More important, Sabbatai signed his name “Your Brother Mehmed *Kapıcıbaşı oturak*” in a note he dispatched to his brother a week after his

¹⁵⁵ Dr. Covel's Diary, 210.

¹⁵⁶ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, 1672–1673, 95.

¹⁵⁷ This is a handsome salary if you compare it to, for example, the salary of palace doctors who earned 47 aspers per day, or the sultan's *imam*, 40 aspers per day. Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi, *Telhisü'l Beyan fi Kavanini Ali Osman* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basmevi, 1998), 59.

¹⁵⁸ Afyoncu, *Sahite Mesih*, 148.

¹⁵⁹ BOA, KK # 3411, p. 62. Cited in Afyoncu, *Sahite Mesih*, 150.

conversion.¹⁶⁰ Except for Kamil Pasha, who claims that Sabbatai was granted the post of palace gardener (*bahçivan*), all other sources are in agreement that his awarded position was that of kapıcıbaşı.¹⁶¹

Sabbatai was not an exceptional convert who was granted an important, real, or honorary position at the palace. For instance, Hayatizade was a paramount example of what one could get in return for conversion. More than a decade before the Sabbatean affair, the Metropolitan of Rhodes converted to Islam and was appointed honorary kapıcıbaşı for his services to the palace.¹⁶² Rycaut gives a rather interesting account of a certain Hasan Agha, from Poland, with whom Mehmed IV fell in love. The sultan gave up his love at some point, but appointed him *kapıcıbaşı* in 1663, with a pension of 150 aspers per day.¹⁶³ Ali Ufki (1610–1675) converted to Islam and became a musician and interpreter at the palace.¹⁶⁴ Cerra Mustafa, a Venetian convert, was put in service supervising the mint technology for Mehmet IV, who wanted to reform the monetary system.¹⁶⁵ The inventor of the *tulumba* (a fire-extinguishing machine), Davud Gerçek, was a Frenchman who came to Istanbul in 1715, converted to Islam, and had a real position.¹⁶⁶ Comte de Bonneval (1675–1747) was a French army officer who converted to Islam and became known as Humbaracı Ahmet Pasha, commander of the Ottoman artillery. Another famous convert was of Hungarian origin, Ibrahim Mütefferrika (1674–1745); he served as an Ottoman diplomat and was the founder of the first Ottoman printing press.¹⁶⁷ Mütefferrika assimilated Ottoman culture rapidly and wrote a Turkish polemical treatise, both defending Islam against other religions and simultaneously criticizing the doctrine of the trinity and the pope.¹⁶⁸

Although some contemporary accounts claim that Sabbatai really performed the job of the kapıcıbaşı, this is very unlikely. The post of kapıcıbaşı was a very demanding job, which would have required him to have a good knowledge

¹⁶⁰ Cited in Coenen, *Sabethai Zevi*, 82.

¹⁶¹ Kamil Pasha, *Tarih-i Siyasi*, II: 104.

¹⁶² Hammer, *Osmanni Devleti Tarihi*, 85.

¹⁶³ Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 182.

¹⁶⁴ Ali Ufki, formerly Wojciech Bobowski was born into a noble family in Poland. He was very talented in music and language. He was kidnapped by the Crimean Tatars and sold in Istanbul as slave. He was taken to the Palace, and converted to Islam. He is reported to have known seventeen languages including, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, French, English, Turkish, and Persian. He was the first to write Turkish music using western notation, and translated many books, including part of the Bible, into Turkish. For more, see Cem Behar, *Ali Ufkî ve Mezmurlar* (Istanbul: Pan, 1990).

¹⁶⁵ Halil Sahillioğlu, “The Role of International Monetary and Metal Movements in Ottoman Monetary History 1300–1750” in *Studies on Ottoman Economic and Social History* ed. H. Sahillioğlu (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1999), 48.

¹⁶⁶ Inciciyan, P.G. XVIII. *Asırda İstanbul* (Istanbul: İstanbul Matbaası, 1956), 86.

¹⁶⁷ He was born in Erdel (Transylvania) to Christian parents. He received a religious education in a Calvinist Unitarian college in Hungary, and became a Unitarian priest. He was abducted and sold into slavery in Istanbul. Niyazi Berkes, “İlk Türk Matbaa Kurucusunun Dini ve Fikri Kimliği,” *Belleten*, 104 (1962): 715–737.

¹⁶⁸ Halil Necatioğlu, *Matbaaci İbrahim-i Müteferrika ve Risale-i İslamiye* (Istanbul: Seha, 1982).

of court etiquette and prior training. There were only four kapıcıbaşı in the sixteenth century, around twenty during the seventeenth century, and sixty at the beginning of the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁹ Among others, the main duty of the kapıcıbaşı and kapıcıs was guardianship of the main palace doors. Dr. Covel likens them to the Master of the Ceremonies at the English court.¹⁷⁰ They held visitors by their two arms tightly and took them into the sultan's presence, where they made sure that the visitors could not attempt an assassination and that they showed sufficient respect to the sultan. In the days of Divan meetings, two kapıcıbaşı stood at the gate of the meeting hall, and others escorted the attendants to the meeting place making sure that no one entered the hall armed.¹⁷¹ When the sultan was on the way to the mosque, his subjects were allowed to give their petitions to him directly. Those petitions were collected by the kapıcıbaşıs. They were also the high officers who carried the imperial edicts to their destinations, where they acted as official representatives of the Divan and, by extension, the sultan himself. All the secret letters of the sultan to other Ottoman high officials were dispatched by kapıcıbaşıs.¹⁷²

Did Sabbatai Sevi ever perform any of these duties? Abdi gives us a very important clue when he says that Sabbatai was "granted the salary of a retired (*tekaud*) chief gatekeeper." In describing the retirement pay of the Sheikhulislam Minkarizade on February 20, 1674, as 1,000 aspers per day, Abdi uses the same word, *tekaud*.¹⁷³ In modern Turkish the word also refers to retirement. What is more, Sabbatai signed his first letter as "Kapıcıbaşı oturak." Although it is a strange noun construction in Turkish, the word *oturak* has the connotation of "sitting," and "residing." A seventeenth-century dictionary explains the word as "Oturmak, nonexpetere. Supersedendo a mansion," referring to a state of inactivity as well.¹⁷⁴ By that signature, Sabbatai might have meant that he was put on the pension of a "retired chief gatekeeper." Therefore, evidence strongly suggest that he was granted only an honorary position at the palace.

Sabbatai was not alone during the trial. Abdi relates that his companion, *refik*, was also converted to Islam, and he or she was granted a position of sergeant (*cavuş*).¹⁷⁵ In Ottoman the word *refik* could theoretically mean any sort of companion, including wife, partner, and friend. Abdi does not mention who converted or when the conversion took place. Just a few days after Sabbatai's conversion, on September 20, 1666, a certain non-Muslim converted to Islam in the presence of the sultan. He was named Ahmed and appointed as a *cavuş*,

¹⁶⁹ I. H. Uzuncarşılı, *Osmalı Devletinin Saray Teşkilatı* (Ankara: TTK, 1988), 404.

¹⁷⁰ Dr. Covel's *Diary*, 189.

¹⁷¹ Uzuncarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, 399.

¹⁷² Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 60a, 137b.

¹⁷³ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 81b. For other retirement cases where the word *tekaud* was used, see ff. 81b, 82b and 107a.

¹⁷⁴ Meninski, *Thesaurus Linguarum Orientalium*, V: 1304.

¹⁷⁵ Çavuş is a term to indicate (a) officials staffing the various Palace departments (b) low-ranking military personnel.

with a wage of 10 aspers per day.¹⁷⁶ There is a possibility that this person was the companion of Sabbatai whom Abdi mentioned.

Kamil Pasha relates that after the conversion, Sabbatai's entire family converted to Islam.¹⁷⁷ Hammer also states that his entire family converted, and that he became a useful tool for Vani to convert the other Jews.¹⁷⁸ According to a later Dönme tradition, Sabbatai was brought from Çanakkale with some of his companions. During the trial, one of them accompanied him and converted to Islam and was granted the post of sergeant. According to this tradition, the other companions were Avraham, Mordechai, David, the secretary Simon, and Yosef Çelebi, who converted the following day. They were renamed İbrahim, Murat, Suleiman, Mahmut, and Yusuf. Their wives followed them and took the names Zehra, Ayşe, and Melike. Sabbatai's wife Sarah came to Edirne the following Friday. Vani Efendi personally took care of her and named her Fatima Zehra.¹⁷⁹ Likewise, Coenen relates that Sabbatai's wife was brought to Edirne one week after the conversion and she converted to Islam.¹⁸⁰

Since the post of *çavuş* could not easily be granted to a woman, it stands to reason that the person who converted to Islam with Sabbatai during the trial was not his wife but one of his aides. It seems that a few more believers, including his wife, converted to Islam a few days after his own conversion. But we are still unable to say how many believers followed in the footsteps of the messiah after the conversion event. Until Sabbatai resumed his missionary activity among his former believers two to three years later, the number of Sabbatean converts must have remained small.

¹⁷⁶ BOA, A.RSK, 30/67.

¹⁷⁷ Kamil Pasha, *Tarih-i Siyasiyye*, II: 104.

¹⁷⁸ Hammer, *Osmanni Devleti Tarihi*, 170.

¹⁷⁹ Oruç, "Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?" *Son Saat*, May 28, 1927.

¹⁸⁰ Coenen, *Sabéthai Zevi*, 82.

From a Global Movement to an Ottoman Sect

The Birth of a Crypto-Messianic Community

EXHAUSTED AFTER AN ARDUOUS conversion experience, Aziz Mehmet Efendi or Sabbatai Sevi found himself partaking in a new social and religious world. He lived another ten years that were full of ambiguities and complexities stemming from his new identity. He began this new life as Aziz Mehmet Efendi at the Edirne palace in 1666, and ended it as Sabbatai Mehmet Sevi in Albania in 1676. Interpretations around the conversion and his new identity were fashioned and refashioned during those years, by both himself and his believers. The dialectic between his self-perception and the perceptions of his believers, his opponents, and the Ottoman authorities caused his identity to oscillate between and across the traditional boundaries of Judaism and Islam. These oscillations would ultimately lead to the emergence of a crypto-messianic sect that came to be known as the Dönmes in subsequent decades.

Observing how Aziz Mehmet signed his letters and notes during the post-conversion period, or what others called him, can provide us some clues regarding the development of his complex identity and the emerging parameters of the Dönme tradition. While he used his new Turkish-Muslim identity in public, he used either his new name or a combination of the new and former names, or his former name only, when he was in communication with his believers. For example, the exclusively Muslim names “Mehmet Efendi b. Abdullah,” “Mehmet Kapıcıbaşı Oturak,” and “Aziz Mehmet Efendi” that he used in 1666 became “Turco” and “Mesurman” in 1668, “Bende-i Mehmet” in 1672, “the Messiah of the God of Israel” in 1674, “Sabbatai Sevi” in 1675, and “Sabbatai Mehmet Sevi” in 1676. In the meantime, his believers kept calling him Amiralı. Fitting to the historical reality, I will use these names interchangeably throughout this chapter.

Of course, Sabbatai’s conversion posed much broader and more significant questions for his believers than simply his own identity crisis. An apostate messiah is a greater paradox for believers than that of a crucified messiah. The doctrine that argues that the redeemer has actually fulfilled his messianic mission by abandoning his or her faith is essentially nihilistic, anti-heroic,

and destructive. His believers nevertheless strove hard to explain the paradox. Nathan explains that the messiah must be reviled and go down into the realm of the evil “shards” (*qelippot*) in order to redeem the holy “sparks” (*nitzotzot*) that are trapped there. Abraham Cardoso, someone who never saw Sabbatai, argued that the messiah must first become a Marrano like himself, just as Queen Esther had to abandon her people and marry King Ahasuerus to ultimately save the Jews. For Baruch Arezzo, the messiah had to descend into the Muslim rather than the Christian shards. To him, all the holy sparks in Edom (Christendom) were concentrated in the Ottoman Empire, for the Janissaries were chosen from among young Christian boys who were taken from their families and brought up as Turks. Therefore, all the holy sparks of Edom and Ishmael are now “sunk” in the Grand Turk.¹ Later Sabbatean theologians developed a secret mystical language, recognizable exclusively to other believers, with which to describe their Sabbatean version of Kabbalistic belief. Sabbatai’s own explanation of the “messianic drama,” however, was different from that of his theologians. His version relied on total secrecy, which was shared with only a select group of believers. When he died in 1676, the messiah left a contested legacy that was appropriated by his believers in competing ways. These different interpretations led, in the following decades, to the emergence of the Dönme subgroups.

After the shocking conversion episode that caused a great number of disillusioned believers to return to their former congregations, a small circle of hardcore believers nevertheless continued to be attracted to the messianic claims of Aziz Mehmet. This small group constituted the core of what would become the Dönme community. In this chapter I reconstruct Sabbatai’s last ten years, and the emergence of the post-messianic community within the larger Ottoman political and cultural milieu.

A New Muslim in the Ottoman World

The trial and conversion ceremony of Sabbatai were over before noon. Now he was called Aziz Mehmet Efendi b. Abdullah, each part of which seems to have been chosen very deliberately.

The name Mehmet (sometimes pronounced as Mehemmed, or *me’emeth*, truth, in Hebrew) is the Ottomanized version of the Arabic Muhammad, the name of Islam’s prophet. Two main actors in the conversion episode, the sultan himself and Vani Efendi, were named Mehmet as well. Sabbatai was named after them. The epithet *Aziz*,² the saint, was added to his name and then the honorific title of Agha, master. A few months after the conversion, we know

¹ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 897.

² *Aziz* means “saintly, holy, sacred and saint.” The term was mostly used for the Christian saints and rarely for Muslims. A famous seventeenth-century mystic, Aziz Mahmud Hudai Efendi, was one of the rare exceptions.

that he was already called Achiz [Aziz] Mehemet Agha Turc.³ The title Agha could be given to him, since the *kapıcıbaşı* were also referred to as aghas. De la Croix refers to him as “Agi Mehemet Efendi, l'estime Docteur Mehemet.”⁴ It seems that the honorific title of Efendi,⁵ which was usually given to those coming from the scholarly (*ulema*) background, appears to have replaced the title Agha shortly afterward, since all the other contemporary and later sources, such as Paul Rycaut, Thomas Coenen, and Antoine Galland are in agreement that he was called Efendi not Agha. Given his rabbinical background, naming him as “Efendi” would therefore have been more meaningful. Naming him both “Aziz” and “Efendi” together indicated that the Ottomans acknowledged his worldly/scholarly and spiritual/saintly qualities from the outset. The honorary title of *kapıcıbaşı*, and the considerable monthly salary granted to him, could be interpreted as Ottoman recognition of his important social and spiritual standing in his previous community.

We do not have his full name in any of the early existing sources, but technically speaking, it must have been Aziz Mehmet Efendi b. Abdullah. Had he appeared in the court, his name would have been registered as such. It was an Islamic and Ottoman practice to call people with their own name, followed by their father's name. In the case of conversion, the name of the convert's father was replaced with a generic name, Abdullah, literally meaning “servant of God.” This change presumes that the convert starts life anew, detaching herself or himself from the person's non-Islamic past.

In order to complete the conversion ceremony, a convert needed to perform a few more rites of passage, such as circumcision and putting on new clothes and parading in the street. Examining a few conversion cases would illustrate what kind of experience a new convert would have gone through in the seventeenth century. Visiting the empire in the 1690s, Du Mund gives an account of the conversion of a Genovese man in Smyrna. Although there must have been some procedural variations, his observation captures the basics of a conversion process:

First, an *imam* makes him perform the *Gosul* [ritual bath] which is their most solemn ablution, and as he begins to wash himself, he pronounces these words “*bis millah el azem ve elem doulillah allah din Islam; in the name of the great god, glory be to god, the god of the musluman faith . . .* the *cadi* says to the renegade “*are you willing to turn Musulman?*” After he has replied, Yes, the *imam* takes the *Alcoran* in both his hands, and holding it above the Christian's head, he says first *bismillah, in the name God*, then addressing himself to the Christian, he proceeds

³ *Relation de la Veritable Imposture du faux Messie des Juifs. Nomme Sabbatay Sevi . . . nome Achiz Mehemet Agha Turc . . . Esrite de Constantinople le vingt-deuxiesme Nouembre 1666* (Paris: Avignon, 1667).

⁴ De la Croix, *Memoires*, 374.

⁵ *Efendi* is an Ottoman title of Greek origin meaning “Lord” or “Master.” From the late fifteenth century onward the title was used by various Turkish and Greek dignitaries.

thus, *Allah ecber, allah ecber, allah ecber, aschad in la illah, illallah, eschad in Mehemet resoul allah*, which are almost the same words that are proclaimed by the *Muezzins* from the *Minarets*, or steeples of the Mosques. The renegade replies, *illah, illallah Mehemet resoul allah; there is no other God, and Mahomet is his great Prophet*; and as soon as he has made a public profession of his faith by pronouncing these words, they put a Turban on his Head, and make him kiss the *Alqoran*, which he could not do before without a crime. . . . He is mounted on a fine horse which the *cadi* lends him, adorned with a rich Vest, which he wears all the rest of the day. . . . But all this pomp is but an introduction to the scene of pain, for as soon as the triumph is over, they proceed to circumcision which is thus performed.⁶

Had Sabbatai been a Christian or a slave, his conversion would have taken many days, since he would have been required to undergo circumcision. The laws and procedures of conversions were systematized and codified by Abdi Pasha in his treatise, *Kanun-u New Muslim* (Law Regarding New Muslims) in 1677.⁷ This codex remained largely in effect until the Tanzimat period. During this period, conversion procedures became much more detailed and bureaucratized, with the aim of proving the conversion to be voluntary. The ultimate aim, of course, as Deringil shows, is to avoid any ambassadorial involvement, which could claim that it was a forced conversion.⁸ As a Jew, Sabbatai must have skipped the circumcision ceremony. He performed the ritual ablution in the bathhouse of Janissary pages. Likewise, had he been young enough, he could have been educated in the *enderun* schools at the palace where many young people were educated and trained in different fields of scholarship ranging from music and fine arts to economic and military service.⁹

After the conversion, a new Muslim could climb up the social ladder in accordance with his merits. Hayatizade, Ali Ufki, and Ibrahim Muteferrika are perfect examples of how young converts could be trained and incorporated into the palace elite. Such high-profile converts and relevant appointments have been seen in every Ottoman century. As Kristic showed in the case of a Hungarian convert, Murad b. Abdullah (c.1509–1586), these high profile converts could be considered “symbolic victories” over the Christian world.¹⁰ Deringil mentions hundreds of “career” converts and their appointments in the Ottoman army and bureaucracy in the nineteenth century.¹¹ These converts never severed their relationships with their former co-religionists and befriended

⁶ Jean Dumont, *A New Voyage to the Levant* (London: Printed for M. Gillyflower, 1696), 335–337.

⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 191.

⁸ Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 42–47.

⁹ For example, on July 5, 1667, three young people from the Polish ambassadorial convoy converted to Islam and were sent to be educated in one of the palaces. Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 83a.

¹⁰ Kristic, “Illuminated by the Lights of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narrative of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009), 35–63.

¹¹ Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 156–196.

many foreigners. For example, Ali Ufki was a bona fide member of the lively Istanbul intellectual circles that included such figures as P. Rycaut, Dr. Covel, A. Galland, Jacob Nagy de Harsany, and Tavernier, as well as Muslim Sufis and intellectuals such as the Sheikhulislam Bahai Efendi and Hazerfan Hüseyin Efendi.¹² As Rycaut notes, the seventeenth-century Ottoman world was very open to converts:

No people in the world have ever been more open to receive all sorts of Nations to them, than they, nor have used more arts to increase the number of those that are called Turks; and it is stranger to consider that from all parts of the world, some of the most dissolute and desperate in wickedness, should flock to these Dominions, to become members and professors of the Mahometan superstition, in that manner that at present, the blood of the Turks is so mixed with that of all sorts of languages, and Nations . . . the English called it Naturalization, the French Enfranchisement; and the Turks call it becoming a Believer.¹³

In one of his poems, Ali Ufki describes the Ottoman palace: “The House of Osman’s palace is the center of the world / Here all nations speak the same language / No one saw such a place anywhere else / There, one can attain whichever goals they pursue.”¹⁴ Aziz Mehmet became part of this cosmopolitan world. And, similar to Hayatizade, Ali Ufki, and Ibrahim Muteferrika, he never detached himself from his former co-religionists and followers.

Living and Schooling at the “Pharaoh’s Palace”

We do not know for sure whether Sabbatai made his first public appearance on Thursday, the very day he converted. If not the first day, then he must have made it on the second day, since it was obligatory for all Muslim males to perform their noon prayers in a mosque on Fridays. In Edirne, it was the Selimiye Mosque, where the sultan and his people attended Friday prayers. On that day, Sabbatai must have made his first public appearance. While on his way to his second Friday prayers, eight days after the conversion (September 24, 1666), he managed to send a small note to his brother, Elijah:

And now let me [be] alone, for God has made me an Ishmaeli. Your Brother Mehmet *Kapıcıbaşı oturak*. For He has declared and it came to be and He has commanded and it will stand [Psalms 3:9]. 24 Elul. Ninth day of my renewal in accordance with His Will.¹⁵

¹² For the intellectual circles in seventeenth-century Istanbul, see Heidrun Wurm, *Der Osmanische Historiker Huseyn b. Cafer, und die Istanbuler Gesellschaft in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg: K. Schwarz, 1971).

¹³ Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 79–80.

¹⁴ Cited in Şükrü Elçin, *Ali Ufki: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Mecmua-i Saz ü Söz* (Istanbul: Kultur Bakanlığı, 1976), vi.

¹⁵ Cited in Coenen, *Sabéthai Zevi*, 82.

The note indicated the psychology of a new convert who truly believed that he had become a Muslim. Without making any reference to the coercion he faced during the trial or resorting to any Kabbalistic explanation as outlined by his believers, Aziz Mehmet seems to have believed that the agent of the entire conversion event was his personal God, not the sultan, Hayatizade, or Vani Efendi. In the coming years, he spent most of his time reflecting on the divine plan of his conversion by utilizing the theological and mystical tools offered by his Jewish and Muslim co-religionists.

The paradoxical impact of the messiah's conversion was not settled swiftly in Jewish communities.¹⁶ Even a year after the conversion, one could see that the Jews were still accusing each other of harboring false beliefs.¹⁷ Wanting to keep everything under control, nine leading Constantinople rabbis sent a letter to Izmir and other cities, asking the Jewish authorities to suppress all remnants of Sabbateanism and to praise the sultan, since he had rescued Judaism from a great calamity.

We command you, that with your authority, under the pain of Excommunication and other penalties, all those Ordinances and Prayers, as well those delivered by the mouth of that man, as those which enjoined by the mouth of others, be all abolished and made void, and to be found no more, and that they never enter more into your hearts. . . . And bless the king Sultan Mahomet; for in his days hath great Salvation been wrought for Israel, and became not Rebels to his Kingdom, which God forbids.¹⁸

Against this general rabbinical ban, Sabbateans continued their activities clandestinely. In later centuries Ottoman rabbis developed a more neutral attitude toward the Sabbateans in comparison to the European rabbis such as Jacob Sasportas (1610–1698), Naphtali Cohen (1649–1718), Moses Hagiz (1676–1750), and Jacob Emden (1697–1776), who condemned the Sabbateans and pronounced the name of Sabbatai with the addition of “may his name and memory be blotted out.” The Ottoman rabbis’ neutral attitude could best be seen in the formulation of the famous rabbi of Izmir, Hayyim Palache (1788–1863), who demanded from Jews, “neither shall you curse him nor shall you bless him.”¹⁹ Interestingly, there has always been a rumor that Sabbatean sympathies continued among some of the Sephardic Turkish rabbis up to modern times.

As he demanded of his “brothers,” Aziz Mehmet was left alone among the Turks in the early days. However, his believers never lost their faith in their messiah. In Edirne, they met in the house of a wealthy believer, Moses Kohen,

¹⁶ For the impact of Sabbatai’s conversion on non-Ottoman Jewish communities, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 751–764.

¹⁷ In one of the archival documents dated, December 17, 1667, Ilya and Yasef, Jews from Izmir, brought a petition claiming that Yosi the Jew kept accusing the Jewish community based on his false beliefs. BOA, Atik Şikayet, # 6, 660.

¹⁸ Cited in Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 182.

¹⁹ Cited in Bezalel Naor, *Post-Sabbatean Sabbateanism* (New York: Orot, 1999), 10.

and later in the house of Joseph Karillo, who had not yet converted to Islam.²⁰ Meanwhile Aziz Mehmet resided at the palace “as Moses lived in the Pharaoh’s palace.”²¹ He could not have lived at the palace for a long period, for only the palace people were allowed to live there permanently. Shortly after his conversion, he moved out to a house, located not far from the Jewish neighborhood in Edirne. He frequented the palace for his education. A year later, a son was born to his family. It is not a coincidence that the baby boy was called Ismail, in clear allusion to the “Ishmaelite” religion that his father had so recently joined.²² It seems that he was still comfortable in his new identity and religion. He himself was called Ebu Ismail, the Father of Ismail, in accordance with Ottoman tradition. The news about Ismail created a new messianic wave among the believers. Israel Hazzan’s account about him in the early 1670s reflects the excitement:

The rank of our Lord Ishmael will be like that of AMIRAH at the time of his anointing, for AMIRAH will be exalted beyond the comprehension of mortals, but “his seed shall be mighty upon the earth” and he will be our Lord. For indeed AMIRAH had called him and told us [in Ishamel’s presence]; this is your Lord.²³

Ismail outlived his father and died in the early 1680s. Despite the fact that the Sabbatean community had high expectations for him, his name disappeared from the Sabbatean literature in later centuries.²⁴

After the conversion, Aziz Mehmet immersed himself in Ottoman political and religious culture, thanks to the rigorous Islamic education provided by Vani Efendi. Having once been a diligent student of Jewish law and mysticism, he had no problem learning the teachings of his adopted religion. Probably secretly from the anti-Sufi Vani Efendi, he also developed a strong interest in Sufism, and joined the *zikr* ceremonies in Sufi lodges in Edirne. Therefore, he already had a double Islamic life while he was Vani’s student. A letter from Sabbatai’s inner circle sent to Samuel Primo in (February–March) 1672 notes that Sabbatai was going to a place called Izurlak/Hizirluk,²⁵ accompanied by

²⁰ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 839.

²¹ Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 184.

²² David Halperin, “The Son of the Messiah: Ishmael Zevi and the Sabbatean Aqedah,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 67 (1996): 143–219.

²³ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 886.

²⁴ According to a Dönme tradition that was communicated to me personally, Ismail’s bloodline continues up to the present time. This marginal tradition is strikingly similar to the widespread stories about “surviving family of Jesus.” Another tradition claims that Sabbatai’s daughter’s bloodline continues to the present.

²⁵ The place being referred to was a Sufi convent on the Hizirluk Hill in Edirne. Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 106b. Apparently the hill had already been recognized as a holy site back in the Byzantium times: “across the river . . . upon the top of a hill . . . It is the best prospect about all Adrianople; they call it Khiderleh, which is the same with St. George, it having been formerly a Greek church of that time. St. George is a great saint even among the Turks.” Dr. Covel’s *Diary*, 248–269. Rycaut gives the name of the convent as the Kanber Tekke. Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 140. This is the famous Bektashi convent destroyed by Vani on account of heretical activities. See Hafiz Hüseyin Ayvansarayı, *Hadikatü'l-Cevami* İstanbul: Isaret, 2001), 576–580; Hammer, *Ottoman Devleti Tarihi*, 173.

the Mullah Mustafa and two or three rabbis, including the recently converted Moses Harari. Hazzan describes these ceremonies as ecstatic rites of mad dervishes, probably judging them by their ecstatic songs, dances, and rhythmical body movements. Referring to one of those ceremonies, Hazzan says “my throat is dried since [they] repeat the name of God so-and-so many times in their prayers according to a number that is known to them.” Hazzan also testifies that in those years the deification of Sevi was already in the making within his inner circles: “Every morning and every evening we say: he and no other, he is our God.”²⁶ Thus, he was steeped in both legal and mystical traditions of Islam in those years.

As mentioned earlier, Vani's enthusiasm for educating the public in general, and new Muslims in particular, was far reaching. De la Croix thinks that it was the sultan's idea to appoint Vani to educate Aziz Mehmet, since the mentality of the sultan and Vani converged with regard to the idea of converting the entire empire into a devout and pure Muslim land in accordance with “the practice of law Mahometane.”²⁷

Given the power of Vani over both the sultan and Sabbatai, it is important to understand his perception of apocalyptic times and Jews.²⁸ Vani was of the opinion that the Turks did indeed have an apocalyptic role to play, as foretold by the Qur'an,²⁹ and that the Turks and the Jews possessed common ancestors. In interpreting the quranic verse, “You will be replaced by another [virtuous] people” (Qur'an, 9:39), Vani Efendi states that God admonishingly sent this verse when the Arabs had not wanted to wage war against the Rum, that is, the Eastern Roman Empire. After giving a long and detailed history of the general conversion of the Turks to Islam and their military victories, especially over the Rums, and their capturing of Constantinople, Vani asserts that the virtuous people foretold by the Qur'an were the Turks.³⁰

In interpreting the quranic verses with regard to the figure of Zulkarnayn, Vani accepts the Turkish folkloric tradition that Oğuzhan, who was the

²⁶ Scholem, “A Commentary on Some Psalms from the Circle of Sabbatai Sevi in Adrianople” [Hebrew], *Aley Ayin: Schocken Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1953), 209.

²⁷ De La Croix, *Memoirs*, 377.

²⁸ He expounds his ideas in full in his quranic commentary, *Araisul Kur'an ve Nefaisul-Furkan ve Feradisul-Cinan* (Süleymaniye Library MS. Hamidiye 82). For a study of this manuscript, see Erdoğan Pazarbaşı, *Vani Mehmed Efendi ve Araisü'l-Kur'an* (Van: Van Belediye Başkanlığı, 1997). For Vani's opinions on Islam, Sufism, and heresy, see his *Risale fi hakka'l-farz ve al-Sunna ve al-Bid'a fi ba'z al-'amal* (Süleymaniye Library, MS. Lala Ismail 685/1).

²⁹ Due to his remarks on the origins of the Turks, early Republican nationalist scholars considered Vani a true nationalist. For example, Ismail Danişmend calls him “a Turkish nationalist in the seventeenth century.” Ismail Hami Danişmend, *Türklük Meseleleri* (İstanbul: İstanbul Kitabevi, 1966), 83. Ironically, Sabbatai was seen as the first Zionist by the twentieth-century Jewish nationalist historians as well.

³⁰ Vani Efendi, *Araisul Kur'an*, 542b–543a: “For ages, we observe that the [Turkish] *gazis* had been fighting with the Greeks (Rum) and Franks in the East and the West, and they captured the entire lands of the Rums and settled there. The lands of Rums, Armenians, Circassians and part of Franks and Russians became Turkish lands. Turkish became a dominant language, Islamic law started to be implemented, and with the effort and struggle [of the Turks], most of the Christians converted to Islam and turned Turk. That is a gift of God bestowed upon the Turkish nation (*millet*).”

mythical originator of the Turkish nation, and Zulkarneyn, were one and the same person. Early Muslim commentators likened the Turks to the End of Days figures of Gog and Magog, due to the fact that they were pagans, coming from the East and destroying the Islamic civilization.³¹ Vani challenged that notion and claimed that the Turks were the ones who helped Zulkarneyn/ Oğuzhan to construct a barrier to stop the Gog and Magog invasion of the world. Speculating about the apocalypse, he quotes a *hadith*: “Unless 70.000 people from ‘the descendants of Isaac’ go to the war ‘there,’ the apocalypse will never come.” Keeping the famous prophetic tradition about Constantinople in mind,³² he interprets “there” as referring to Constantinople, and “the descendants of Isaac” as referring to Turks. Why were the Turks called “the descendants of Isaac”? Vani opines that Oğuzhan was a contemporary of Abraham, and one of his believers. He married one of the daughters of Isaac, who was one of the sons of Abraham and one of the sisters of Jacob/Israel. Hence the Turks, like the people of Israel, were the descendants of Isaac and Abraham. Interestingly enough, he separates the Turks from the Arabs, who descended from the Ishmaelite bloodline, and says that “As Jesus Christ was of the descendants of Israel, the Turks were of the descendants of Isaac.”³³ Ironically this would certainly enrich the “Thirteen Tribe” speculations, which asymmetrically claim that the Eastern European Jews were of Turkish origin.

Vani completed his commentary a few years after the death of Sabbatai. Could he have formed some of his ideas as the result of his conversations with Sabbatai? If Rycaut is correct, Vani thought that it was “no disparagement, from so great a Rabbin as his new Disciple, to learn something of the Jewish rites.”³⁴ It is not a coincidence to see Vani offering unconventional explanations about the history of Jews and possible common origins of the Turks and Jews in his commentary. Somewhat exaggeratedly, Dönme tradition reinforces the idea that Vani was manipulated by Sabbatai.³⁵ Terzioğlu rightly speculates that Niyazi Mısıri knew about the rumors surrounding the relationship between Vani and Sabbatai, and these rumors were in the back of Mısıri’s mind when he accused Vani of being a crypto-Jew and of having secretly converted the entire sultanic family to the Jewish faith.³⁶

³¹ For Zulkarneyn and his fight against Gog and Magog, see Quran: 18:94 and 21: 96–97. For the relationship between the Turk and Gog-Magog, see Ismail Cerrahoğlu, “Ye’cuc- Me’cuc ve Türkler,” *Ankara İlahiyat Fakultesi Dergisi* 20(1975): 97–125.

³² The Hadith reads: “Constantinople will be surely conquered. Those who will conquer it are the blessed soldiers.” Cited in Vani Efendi, *Araisul Kur'an*, 543a.

³³ Vani Efendi, *Arais*, 544b. Interestingly, English historian Aaron Hill makes a similar claim to that of Vani with regard to the Jewish origin of Turks. Having a very negative opinion of both nations, Hill asserts that the Tartars were descendants of the Ten Tribes and that, since the Turks were of Tartarian origin, the Turks were also most probably of Jewish origin. Aaron Hill, *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: J. Mayo, 1709), 328–332.

³⁴ Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 185.

³⁵ Amarillo, “Sabbatean Documents,” 255–259.

³⁶ Derin Terzioğlu, “Sufi and Dissent: Niyazi Misri,” unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Harvard University 1999), 145.

Perhaps it was one of the reasons Vani was consistently cruel to the sultan's Christian subjects but somewhat more lenient toward the Jews in general and Sabbatai in particular. His effort directed toward the "rabbin as his new disciple" bore fruit, and the disciple, as Rycaut writes, "profited beyond measure in the Turkish Doctrine." But in return, Vani Efendi appears to have learned things from his disciple, the extent of which is still not sufficiently known.³⁷ Maturing in Islamic education and gaining the trust of the sultan and Vani, Aziz Mehmet was ready to begin a mission among the Jews and bring them into the Islamic fold. Before examining his missionary activities among the Jews, we need to explore Sabbatai's self-perception so that we can understand the beginning of his double life—a Muslim Turk in public but a messianic Jew in private.

Self-Perception of the Messiah and the Mystery of the Godhead

What was the nature of Sabbatai's self-perception? Did he ever regret converting to Islam? Did he continue to believe in his messianic role in the *tiqqun*, spiritual mending of the universe? What was the "mystery" to which he had been continuously referring in his communications with his believers? Given the paucity of his own systematic writings, we have to answer these questions by examining the details of his letters, his believers' accounts, and the subsequent Dönme tradition. First, it seems that he never regretted his conversion; on the contrary, he saw it as an opportunity to comprehend the Truth in full, something necessary for "mending" the spiritual realm and hastening redemption. Second, his explanations for the mystery of his conversion and of the Godhead were different from those of Nathan of Gaza, Abraham Cardozo, Israel Hazzan, Abraham Cuenque, Samuel Primo, and the subsequent Dönme tradition, which was a creative and dynamic mixture of the previous accounts.

There is almost no reference in Sabbatai's accounts to the "mystery" until after his conversion. Might he have developed the discourse on the "mystery" to lure more converts to his cause? Whatever the reason, he was so keen in guarding it that, according to one of his believers, Cuenque, he entrusted it to only some of his believers. Having sworn them to secrecy, Sabbatai told them: "This is the knowledge of God. Henceforth you shall know whom you serve and who your God is."³⁸ Since Sabbatai, like many Sufis, was averse to writing down the mystery in a systematic fashion, we do not know its full nature. His contemporary followers and modern scholars have different opinions about its nature. I believe that by examining Sabbatai's writings and deeds we can approximate his own reasoning for his conversion as well as his explanation of the mystery of the Godhead.

³⁷ Ironically, members of a contemporary Sabbatean family in Bursa claim that they come from the bloodline of both Vani and Sabbatai.

³⁸ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 914.

Steeped in intensive Islamic teaching and Ottoman culture, Sabbatai wrote a lengthy letter to his old circle sometime around 1669, describing his reasons for conversion. In the letter, he does not refer to the moment of the trial at the palace, where he was interrogated by the Ottoman authorities and forced to convert to Islam on the pain of death. In the spirit of his short note in 1666, he was still quite confident that “his God” had “willed that he should enter with all his heart into the religion of Ishmael.” Fittingly, he signed the letter as “the Turco and the Mesurman.” Even three years after the conversion, he did not hint at the need of descending into the dark realm, *qelippot*, to liberate the fallen sparks of the Lurianic Kabbala, as Nathan would have explained later.

Know ye my brethren, my children, and my friends, that I recognized with great clarity that the True [God] whom I alone know for many generations and for whom I have done so much, has willed that I should enter with all my heart into the Islamic religion *din-i Islam*, the religion of Ishmael, *le-hatir hatira ve le-asur asira*, [to permit what is permitted and to forbid what is forbidden], and to nullify the Torah of Moses until the End of Times. For this is important for the glory of His Godhead and for his revelation that I should induct herein everyone whose soul would agree with me [to do so] after I would reveal to them the [Mystery of] His Godhead, which is [capable of being] demonstrated with utmost stringency; that is, the supreme rank of His true being and the wondrous glory of the Cause of All Causes. And this is what the psalm says [Ps. 119:126]: [When] it is time to work for God, they nullify Thy Torah, as the Ishmaelites used to say: The Torah of Moses is nullified, as is also esoterically implied in the Talmudic saying [where God is reported to have said to Moses]: May thy strength increase because you broke the tablets of the Covenant, [and this is so] because the Torah of Moses without [the knowledge] of [the] True One is worth nothing as it is said [II Chron. 15:3]: For a long time Israel is [to be] without the True God and without the Torah. Since they do not have True God, his [Moses’] Torah is no Torah. But *Din Islam haqq haqq* [the religion of Islam is the very Truth]. And when Maimonides of blessed memory was formulating the dogma “The Law God gave he never will amend/Nor ever by another Law replace,” he was completely mistaken because he did not know the God of Truth, who is the God of Sabbatai Sevi. And do not believe, my brethren, that I did this [becoming a Muslim] on the strength of an illumination so that you became terrified and say: today or tomorrow the illumination will depart from him and he will regret what he had said and will be very sorry for it. This is not so, but I did this on my own, through the great power and strength of the Truth and Faith which no wind in the world and no sages and prophets cause me to leave my place . . . thus speaks the master of Truth and Faith, the Turco and the Mesurman.³⁹

³⁹ The letter was written in a mixture of Ladino and Hebrew, and it was included in one of the letters of Nathan to the Jewish community in Kastoria. Here I utilized Scholem’s translation with some revisions. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 841–842. For an analysis of the letter, see Yahuda Liebes, “Sabbatai Sevi’s Attitude towards His Own Conversion,” *Sefunot* 17 (1983): 267–307.

Although Sabbatai Sevi refers to his conversion, his real “mystery” is not about the conversion but about the Godhead and his relationship thereto. In justifying his conversion, he utilized his newly acquired polemical Islamic arguments against Jews and Judaism. We are not sure whether he was already aware of some of this polemical literature, which had been in wide circulation in the seventeenth century. Given his intensive Islamic education, it would not be surprising if he was. Within the same polemical spirit he maintained that Islam nullified the Torah of Moses until “the End of Times.” As Muslim theologians or other converts would have claimed, Islam abrogated (*nash*) and replaced not only Judaism but all previous religions.

Sabbatai Sevi perceived himself as having a direct connection with God. This direct link placed him above all the religious establishments. If Moses brought the Torah, then he, Sabbatai, as a new Moses could revoke it. More important, he thought that Israel had in any case been “for a long time . . . without the True God . . . and without Torah” (Chronicles II, 15:3) anyway. This was a very common theme in Sabbatean literature, especially in describing the exile.⁴⁰ Therefore, there is no point in adhering to the Torah when it was abrogated and God was not known. This assumption is the clear departure point for his antinomian behaviors.

In demonstrating the veracity of his adopted religion, Sabbatai emphasizes that Islam permits what is permitted and forbids what is forbidden (*le-hatir hatira ve le-asur asira*). This is a near translation of “commanding good, and prohibiting evil” (*emr bi'l-ma'ruf nehy-i ani'l-munkar*), an Islamic principle that inspired the Kadizadelis and particularly Vani Efendi. A comparable duty of forbidding the wrong in others is already prescribed in the Bible: “You shall reprove your neighbor (*hokheah tokhiah et-'amitekha*), or you will incur guilt yourself” (Lev. 19:17). It means that if a man sees something wrong in his neighbor, it is his duty to rebuke him. Knowing both rabbinical and Islamic traditions, he made allusions to both of them to convince the Jews converting to Islam. Islam, like Judaism, he assured his followers, was itself to be abrogated by a higher revelation at the end of time. As claimed by Liebes, higher revelation will not be the “Torah of creation,” but a new Torah, the “Torah of *Atzilut*” which will contain the ultimate Truth.⁴¹ Until then, it is important to consider Islam as a necessary and penultimate stage on the way to the redemption. Therefore, converting to Islam was not viewed as a “punishment” required for *tiqqun* but simply as a “great mystery” in Sabbatean cosmology.

In another letter, Sabbatai, using the Kabbalistic *sefirot* scheme, referred to Islam as “the Torah of *Hesed* (Compassion)” and Judaism as the “Torah of Creation,” whose God dwells in *Tiferet* (Beauty).⁴² The *sefirot* scheme is the famous

⁴⁰ Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, 106.

⁴¹ Yehuda Liebes, “Sabbatai Sevi’s Religious Faith,” in *Studies in Jewish myth and Jewish Messianism*. Yehuda Liebes (Albany: SUNY, 1993), 107–115.

⁴² Amarillo, “Sabbatean Documents,” 252, and Liebes, “Sabbatai Sevi’s Religious Faith,” 112.

kabbalistic doctrine which explains the relationship between the infinite, unknowable God, Ein Sof, and our created world, through the ten emanations, *sefirot* -*Keter* (crown), *Hochmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (understanding), *Da'at* (knowledge), *Hesed* (compassion, loving kindness), *Gevurah* (strength), *Tiferet* (beauty), *Netzah* (victory), *Hod* (splendor), *Yesod* (foundation), and *Malkhut/Shekhina* (kingdom).

Perhaps remembering the conversion episode when he was asked to convert on the pain of death, and then his life was spared by the mercy of the sultan, Sevi chose to refer to Islam as the religion of *Hesed*. According to the Sabbatean model, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob embodied the qualities of *Hesed*, *Gevurah/Din* (Judgment), and *Tiferet*, respectively. While Jacob fathered the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Abraham gave birth to Ishmael, and Isaac gave birth to Esau (then to Jacob). Esau (who married Ishmael's daughter—Genesis 28:6–9) and Ishmael are seen as the two spiritual roots for the Nations of the World. Therefore Ishmaelites possess parts of the truth and the mystery of the Godhead. As discussed earlier, Vani Efendi, in explaining the Jewish origin of the Turks, claimed that Oguz, the Turkish ancestor, was married to the daughter of Isaac. In the later Dönme-Karakış tradition, while Sabbatai as bride was associated with Shekhina, Osman Baba as groom, the founding leader of the sect, was associated with *Tiferet* or the God of Israel (*Malkha Kadisha*) and *Ein-Sof* was associated with the “Holy Ancient One” (*Atika Kadisha*). It is also interesting to note that in Christian Kabbala, *Tiferet* is associated with Jesus Christ, “God the Son” and *Keter* with God the Father.

Understanding the role of the *Tiferet* is critical here. It unites all other nine *sefirot*. More particularly it, being in the middle column of the ten *sefirot*, represents the ideal balance of *Din* and *Hesed*. A letter from the inner circle which was sent to Samuel Primo around March 1672 indicates that Sabbatai had turned completely to the “Law of *Hesed*.” Sevi told him: “I have no satisfaction from anything and I am not going to forsake the law of *Hesed*, for through it there will be my redemption in the face of the sun.”⁴³ According to a contemporary Dönme tradition, Sabbatai is even reported to have said that Muhammed will be next to him during the *təhiyya*, resurrection, and that “he will be like a pearl at his table.”

As Scholem demonstrates, Sabbatai identified the God of Israel sometimes with *Tiferet*, but at other times with “*Tiferet* as being a clothing” of God, who was a more interior being that was not identical with the *Ein-Sof* or the “First Cause” but is a “Secondary Cause” emanating from it.⁴⁴ This understanding of personalized God places Sabbatai closer to the prophetic Kabbalistic tradition that emphasized the union with God, *Unio Mystica* via practical and ecstatic methods. He articulated his faith by resorting to the personal Kabbala of the Zohar rather than to the mechanistic Lurianic one. As discussed in the fourth chapter, Abraham Elqayam and Moshe Idel already demonstrated that Sabbatai’s interpretations were closer to the Kabbala of the Byzantine tradition

⁴³ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 852.

⁴⁴ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 862.

and that of Abulafia (1240–1291), who formulated his theories in conjunction with the Muslim mystics of the East. His God was more easily found in soul than in mind.⁴⁵ This knowledge could not be intellectually communicated and shared with others; instead it could perhaps be communicated through ecstatic communal experience such as *zikr* and music. It is not words that are vital, but the face-to-face relationship between the bearer (master) and the receiver (disciple) of the message. Therefore, like many anti-intellectual Sufis who were opposed to writing down the “secrets” of their path,” Sabbatai shared his mystery not through writings, but through the face-to-face relation in the Levinasian sense. Hazzan states that he had “seen people imploring AMIRAH to join him in his *tiqqun* when he took the turban, but he would not permit it except to a few” whom he found worthy enough to participate in his mission.⁴⁶ This was also a certain method to make sure that only the deserving individuals should receive the mystery.

In interpreting the mystery of Sabbatai’s conversion, Wolfson states that only the worthy of Sabbatai’s adherents, “entered this crucible and broke the law of Moses to bring about the rectification of the world through the wearing of the turban (*tiqqun ha-‘olam bi-levishat ha-sanif*).” Wearing the turban is thus endowed with eschatological significance.⁴⁷ According to him, the real mystery is the symbolism of the turban. The turban has been transformed from a token of apostasy to an emblem of eschatological transfiguration. Wolfson thinks that this symbolism was well captured by Baruch of Arezzo in his account of Nathan: “When the sage, Nathan, heard that he placed the holy turban on his head, he knew wholeheartedly that our master gave himself to the [demonic] shell in order to purify from there the sparks of holiness, just as Abraham took Hagar the Egyptian, Jacob the daughters of Laban, and Moses the daughter of Jethro. . . . He had to do this in order to rectify the world in the Kingdom of Shaddai.” Therefore, Wolfson argues, by putting on the turban, Sabbatai and his followers were reintegrating the feminine into the masculine and thereby the blemish in the Godhead, which resulted from the primordial splitting of the male androgynous, was rectified.⁴⁸ It seems to me, however, that this symbolic understanding of the turban would have been more of Sabbatai’s followers rather than his own.

What seems to be novel in Sabbatean Kabbala is its attempt to overcome the duality of good and evil, which originated from the same divine source. In this mystical pantheism, the sphere of evil as the “other side” assumed a new meaning in which creation was understood as a dialectical process taking place between two aspects from the same source.⁴⁹ Sabbatai’s biggest originality,

⁴⁵ Liebes, “Sabbatai Sevi’s Religious Faith,” 110.

⁴⁶ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 858.

⁴⁷ Wolfson, “The Engenderment of Messianic Politics,” 229.

⁴⁸ Wolfson, “The Engenderment of Messianic Politics,” 256.

⁴⁹ For more on this doctrine, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 302.

and perhaps the most sensational mystery, however, is not his understanding of the “God of Israel” who dwells in *Tiferet*, but the Godhead and the First Cause. The Godhead has a non-religious nature and is both immanent in and transcendent of the ten *sefirot*. The secret of the Zoharic “three knots of faith,” that is the three manifestations of the Godhead in the hidden world of the ten *sefirot*, lies here too.⁵⁰ Making a special emphasis on the central and indispensable role of the evil in this cosmic mystery, the Karakaş tradition adds a fourth pillar to the Sabbatean secret. This symbolism can be seen in many tombs in the Dönme graveyards (Figure 3.1). According to this symbolism the *sephirotic* scheme is not represented horizontally but vertically (also non-hierarchically), and divided into four main spheres, and the evil is one of them.

We can find the traces of Sabbatai’s mystery in the writings of Samuel Primo (c. 1635–1708), who was the secretary and confidant of Sabbatai both before and after the conversion.⁵¹ Primo’s exposition of the mystery was quoted by



FIGURE 3.1 Tombstone: Four pillars, symbolizing the four essential elements in the Sabbatean cosmology. Bülbülderesi Cemetery, Istanbul. Photo courtesy of the author.

⁵⁰ For its interpretations, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 870–871. Also see Chapter 6.

⁵¹ Primo was one of the early followers of Sevi in Jerusalem; he later joined him in Constantinople. While Sevi was imprisoned on the Dardanelles, Primo served as his secretary. It was he who composed the circular letters of the “Messiah.” He moved to Sofia but stayed in touch with Sevi and other believers until his death. He visited Sevi several times in his exile, where Sevi exposed him to his teaching concerning the “mystery of the Godhead.” Sometime after 1680 he moved to Adrianople where he became rabbi of the Apulia Synagogue. For his writings, see Amarillo, “Sabbatean Documents,” 271–274.

Cardozo who heard it from Hayyim Malakh, a famous Polish Sabbatean and a friend of Primo. Similar to other Sabbatean ideas, the theory about mystery, as outlined by Primo, was very unsystematic. According to Primo, “there is in the First Cause an infinitely simple Will which had from all times been contained in its root. When this Will willed that existence should come into being, it emanated from the Lord, or the owner of the Will, like light from its source. From the simple Will also the *Shekhina*, which is of the nature of *Din*, proceeds. *Shekhina* is signified by the final H of the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, and when she descends into the emanation, she clothes herself in the *Malkhuth*. The simple Will, the Holy One Blessed be He is signified by the first three letters YHW of the Tetragrammaton, and it is clothed in *Tiferet*.⁵²

In this explanation, “the First Cause” or “cause of all causes” emerges as something above and beyond everything including the God of Israel who is clothed in *Tiferet*. More important, the First Cause is above and beyond all religious forms and frameworks. The sparks of the First Cause were descended to other *sefirot* and realms from whence the other religions—including Islam—emanated. Therefore, it is imperative to grasp the impartial truths embedded in other religions and nations. In one of the earlier Sabbatean tracts, compiled after the conversion, Sabbatai is reported to have said, “I went out into the field to reap the seed that had been sown among the nations.”⁵³

Such a reinterpretation of the “First Cause” provided Sabbateans, and later the Frankists, with an unprecedented interest in other religions, which could contain parts of the ultimate -trans-religious Truth. As Liebes states, this interest has two aspects, “one of anger and revenge, which brought them to convert out of a desire to destroy their newly adopted religion from within; and the other a friendly one, including attempts at religious renewal assisted by other religions.”⁵⁴

Unsurprisingly, developing a genuine interest in other religions and placing the “cause of all causes” above the religions could have been an abhorrent heresy for both Jews and Muslims, as well as for some of the Sabbatean believers. That’s why Sabbatai guarded the mystery of the Godhead so closely, revealing it to only a select few among his believers. This is also why he never recommended conversion in his absence; rather he invited the believers to convert into Islam in his presence. Then, he revealed the mystery to those who were trustworthy and capable of understanding it. Later Dönme tradition believed that Sabbatai chose among the chosens and sent them to Salonica.

By this distinctive approach to *tiqqun* and redemption, colored by an Islamic argument against Judaism, Sabbatai differed from other Sabbatean theologians, especially from Nathan and Cardozo. For obvious reasons, Sevi was much more knowledgeable of Islam than his other believers, and this

⁵² Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 911.

⁵³ *Shaduta deMehemenutha*, cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 829–831.

⁵⁴ Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, 106.

knowledge might have had an effect on his ideas. Until modern times, none of the Sabbatean believers studied Islam as much as Sabbatai himself. Although he refashioned some of his statements about Islam and Judaism in his later communications, a particular understanding of Islam and Judaism remained as parts of his identity until the end of his life. Sabbatai's interpretation of his conversion and the mystery of the Godhead was the most important impetus behind the formation of the Dönme Kabbala and of the Eighteen Commandments. The Commandments, in addition to aiming to provide structure to the communal life of his followers, were also meant to be a spiritual shell to guard the mystery. Those who converted to Islam under the auspices of Sabbatai, and their descendants, were considered to be the elect of the elect, that is, elite Sabbateans. The elects were the ones entrusted to share the messianic responsibility, tribulation, and redemption. Their refusal to convert, in case it was desired by Sevi, would have prevented the accomplishment of the full redemption. Hazzan thinks that "they who took the turban at the behest of AMIRAH will be judged according to the righteousness which they dealt with Israel in entering this *tiqqun* for the sake of the Israelite nation."⁵⁵ Conversion was subject to the messiah's command and was not a matter of the believers' individual desire. Those who converted after Sevi's death were usually considered commoners. Only the elite were exposed to the mystery and the inner meaning of the Commandments. The commoners were simply asked to live in accordance with the Commandments. By contemplating the mystery and abiding by the commandments, both the elite and the commoners were to help the messiah fulfill the mission of mending the universe and the Godhead.

The Early Messianic Community

Until his banishment to Albania in 1673, Aziz Mehmet spent most of his time in Edirne, Istanbul, and Salonica and shared his "secrets" with his believers. We cannot be sure how soon he started to communicate with his believers, but it would not be surprising to see that he was meeting with them soon after the conversion. As repeatedly seen in Ottoman documents, it was very common for converts to maintain their relations with their former co-religionists. It seems that Aziz Mehmet, albeit very secretly, resumed his messianic activities after the initial shock of the conversion experience. Most probably hearing or witnessing the Ottoman treatment of other sedition cases in those years, he must have known that the Ottoman authorities, especially the sultan, the grand vizier, and Vani Efendi, had little tolerance for perceived religious sacrileges and heresies.

As shown earlier, messianic fervor did not die out among Jewish communities in major European and Ottoman cities such as Salonica, Istanbul, Izmir,

⁵⁵ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 858.

Aleppo, Cairo, and Jerusalem after the conversion of the messiah.⁵⁶ Edward Browne, traveling through the Balkans in September 1669, observed that the Sabbatean spirit was very much alive among the Jews. He, in the town of Larissa, heard some Turkish songs, concerning Sabbatai.⁵⁷ In the early 1670s, Antoine Galland relates that messianic hope among the Balkan Jews was quite pronounced and widespread. There, Galland was given a Hebrew note about Sabbatai's redemptive power. The note was originally passed by a certain Elie to a Hungarian Jew, who passed it to Galland. A part of the note reads: "The truth came. David the deliverer who is the ruler and came with the intention of saving the soul"⁵⁸

In the meantime, Sabbatai clandestinely continued to meet with his followers. On the Passover of 1668 he is reported to have said that he had begun receiving new inspirations and 24,000 angels had visited him during Passover. The angels told him that he was the king and the messiah. In another tractate, compiled by one of his followers, he is said to have experienced the presence of God, and talked to him; God said "Thou hast more pity on my children than I do."⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the believers in Edirne received considerable reinforcement from Nathan's frequent visits, and they began to prepare for the second manifestation of the messiah. This manifestation in power and glory was expected to take place in 1673–1674, seven years after the conversion. That was the time when "collecting the holy seed that was sown among the gentiles" and the conversion of the gentiles (to Judaism) would be accomplished.⁶⁰ As Najara narrates, on the day of Purim, Sabbatai celebrated the festival at the house of Joseph Karilla with the traditional liturgical reading of the Scroll of Ester. Afterward, he attended a service in the Portuguese synagogue.

While messianic hopes for redemption continued among some Jews, Vani Efendi had a different plan for them. Encouraged by the recent success of the Cretan war over the Venetians in 1669, Ottoman self-confidence and ambition was at its peak in turning the world into the land of Islam. Within this grandiose plan, Aziz Mehmet could serve as a perfect tool for converting more Jews to Islam. With the same zeal, for example, Vani tried to convert Panayoti, a Greek intellectual and palace interpreter, in order to gain more Greeks to Islam, but without success.⁶¹

⁵⁶ For post-Sabbatean developments in Europe, see Matt Goldish, *Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Edward Browne, *A Brief Account of Some Travels in Hungaria and Macedonia* (London: Printed by T.R. 1673), 58.

⁵⁸ Antoine Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar, 1672–1673* (Ankara: TTK 1987), I: 252.

⁵⁹ *Shaduta deMehemenutha*, cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 829–831.

⁶⁰ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 839.

⁶¹ It was Köprülü Ahmed's intention to convert Panayoti, and for that purpose he designed a debate between Vani and him, but Panayoti is reported to have prevailed in the debate. See Hammer, *Osmalı Devleti Tarihi*, 170–171. Galland tells that Köprülü admired the eloquence and erudition of Panayoti and hired him as the chief dragoman at the palace. Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, 219.

Once Vani thought that Aziz Mehmet had completed his Islamic education, he sent him to proselytize among the Jews, probably in 1669. Aziz Mehmet is reported to have promised Vani Efendi to convert more Jews to Islam and bring “the principal Rabins to the feet of the Emperor to renounce Judaism and to declare the Mahometisme.”⁶² Backed by sultanic authority and his own messianic convictions, Aziz Mehmet undertook the double mission of converting the Jews to Islam and to his cause. He visited synagogues in Edirne, Istanbul, and Salonica, and preached his idiosyncratic doctrine to believers and non-believers alike, sharing his “mystery” with the trustworthy followers. These sermons are almost reminiscent of the forced sermons in Spain in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, when the Jews were brought to the churches and forced to listen to proselytizing sermons. According to Tobias Cohen, he “sometimes prayed and behaved like a Jew, and sometimes like a Muslim, and he did queer things.”⁶³ Since he was preaching in Ladino, the Ottoman escorts were not able to monitor his message in the synagogues. His sermons to encourage conversion were also mentioned by a Florentine ambassador, Santi Bani, in a report written in 1671.⁶⁴

Aziz Mehmet’s visits to the synagogues and his messianic activities were met with ambivalence by the Jews. While a small group of Jews were ready for the messianic call, the majority of the Jews were very cautious not to get swept away in another messianic fervor that was liable to end in disappointment. In those years, another Jewish messianic pretender, Sabbatai Raphael, appeared in Izmir but was immediately “taken care” of by the Jewish authorities, who accused him of adultery and procured a sentence from the *kadi*.⁶⁵ But the case of Aziz Mehmet was not so easy for the Jews to handle. Since his activities were sanctioned by the sultan and he was escorted by Ottoman officials, it was impossible to simply physically prevent him from fulfilling his mission.⁶⁶ Angiroslo Cohen, the chief rabbi of Edirne, tried his best to avert the danger by alerting his people, but that did little to change the ultimate results. From the Ottoman perspective, Aziz Mehmet’s ability was proven in the following months and years, for many Jews converted to Islam. There were times when Aziz Mehmet asked his followers to appear before him and he explained to them that everything had been ordained in Heaven as it was written in the *Pirkei Avot* of Rabbi Eliezer that the messiah would be swallowed among the Ishmaelites.⁶⁷ This explanation caused several more Jews to convert to Islam.

⁶² De la Croix, *Memoirs*, 379.

⁶³ Jacob Emden, *Zoth Torath ha-Qena'oth* (Altona: n.p., 1752) 46.

⁶⁴ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 824.

⁶⁵ Sisman, “The Jewish Messiah from Tartaria in 1671.”

⁶⁶ Dr. Covel, visiting Edirne in the 1670s, relates that Jews lived at the end of the town and were quite poor, and most of them believed in superstition and magic. *Dr. Covel’s Diary*, 190–192.

⁶⁷ Scholem claims that this is a Sabbatean misreading of Eliezer’s statement. Rabbi Eliezer, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (New York: Hermon Press 1965), 222.

The more new converts he gained, the more privileges he was granted by the Ottoman authorities.

Many Jews flocked in, some as far as from Babylon, Jerusalem, and other remote places, and casting their Caps on the ground, in presence of the Grand Signior, voluntarily professed themselves Mahometans. Sabbatai himself by these Proselytes gaining ground in the esteem of the Turks, had privilege granted him to visit familiarly his Brethren, which he employed in Circumcis- ing their Children the eighth Day, according to the precept of Moses, preaching his new Doctrines, by which he hath confirmed many in their Faith of his being the Messiah.⁶⁸

This is an observation that Rycaut penned only three years after the conversion event. It means that Aziz Mehmet's double life was so well known that a foreigner who lived in Smyrna could have heard of some of his "secret" activities. De la Croix tells that he often saw Aziz Mehmet walking in the street, surrounded by a large company of apostate Jews who followed him to the synagogues where he fulfilled his mission with success.⁶⁹ Likewise, Gal- land confirms that they saw Aziz Mehmet parading with tens of new converts on the streets.

In 1671, Jacob Najara of Gaza, who was one of the earliest believers in Sabbatai, spent almost a year in Edirne on the way to Morocco. Thanks to his chronicle, we have great deal of information about the inner lives of the Sabbatean believers of the time.⁷⁰ He recounts that Sabbatai was cut off from visions and revelations for a year and two months, and then, probably referring to the revelation over Passover in 1668, he had a dream in which he saw himself falling into a pit where his parents threw down a rope so that he could climb to freedom.⁷¹

In his dream, behold, AMIRA had fallen in a pit; he thought that he could come out, he looked up and his mother and father were standing at the edge of the pit and threw him a rope and raised him from the pit. He was happy in his dream that he saw that he came up from the pit Sabbatai, along with the four men of Vani Efendi, came to the store of his brother, and asked him to convert to Islam immediately. He revealed what he revealed and he achieved the enlightenment. His brother and his son accepted the offer and went to Vani's house, and wore the turban. At Purim he left the brother and son and went to Joseph Carillo, read *megilla*, and celebrated Purim. The next day he rode on a horse. After the Purim he went to the house of Jacob Elvo, and he was invited there with six other people.

⁶⁸ Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire*, 184.

⁶⁹ De la Croix, *Memoirs*, 381.

⁷⁰ Jacob Najara's chronicle cited in Amarillo, "Sabbatean Documents from the Saul Amarillo Collection," *Sefunot* 1961 (5): 254–262.

⁷¹ It is very interesting to see the recurrence of the same dream in a nineteenth-century account of a Sabbatean, Mehmet Esad Dede. See chap. 7.

There he prayed with the rabbis and celebrated Shabbat in a great joy. . . . Then he and his son went to the Portuguese synagogue and there he gave a speech. That day, many *Goyim* were listening to him in silence around the synagogue. . . . Then he performed *namaz*. Then he returned to the mentioned house and he did the *Sharit*, Morning Prayer. He did dance and sing until morning. He performed *namaz*, and *Musaf*, night prayer, told blessings loudly. The *goyim* were listening and looking, and none of them said anything. Then he went to his house, and he brought his *Zohar*, he was very joyful until sunset, and Saturday night, he said that he invited all the *maaminim* [believers], and told them that all should have worn Turban [*Tzanij*]. Next morning he went to the king, who was sitting behind the lattice. [The] grand vizier and other dignitaries were sitting there. He put Turban on them and the king ordered [them to receive pensions]. Sabbatai Sevi told the king he is not willing to accept the gift, since he does not want to have people to convert for money but conviction, total faith . . . 12 men, 5 women more converted . . . divorced Sara in 1671 March.⁷² . . . son was given to him. . . . A group of rabbis came from Brussa, and discussed with Sabbatai at the presence of the sultan and Vani Efendi.⁷³

When Nathan arrived in Edirne he met several members of the emerging Sabbatean community, including the representatives of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. As Najara indicates, however, Sabbatai cancelled the honorary titles of the Twelve Tribes, appointed previously in Gaza, and elected new kings, who became the Dönme elites in the new Sabbatean order.

In other instances, Sabbatai took them to the presence of the sultan and put turbans on their heads. For example, once he had a discussion with several Jewish rabbis in the presence of the sultan and made some of them, such as Joseph Karillo and Abraham Gamaliel, convert to Islam. In yet another instance, he took four scholars from Bursa into the presence of the sultan and most likely made them convert to Islam as well, as indicated in Najara's account.

Knowing Sabbatai's zeal for conversion, Nathan avoided him as much as possible and also asked the believers to stay away from him. The early converts considered themselves to be the elect of the "true Israel." Unfortunately, we have the names of only a few of them. Ottoman archival and court documents from different centuries give accounts of hundreds of Jews, who converted to Islam for various reasons ranging from achieving higher status to serving in the Ottoman palace, marrying a Muslim woman, solving personal economic and social problems, adultery, economic opportunism, and religious conviction.⁷⁴

⁷² To Nathan, the reason for the divorce was that "Sara was constantly picking quarrels with him and sought to persecute him with all her might. She even tried twice to put poison in his food." Next year, however, Sabbatai had "mercy" on his divorced wife and "against the advice of all his friends" as Nathan says, he remarried her. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 850–851.

⁷³ Amarillo, "Sabbatean Documents," 254–262. I used Scholem's translation with minor revisions. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 842.

Drawing primarily on the *responsa* literature, Bornstein-Makovetsky argues that men usually converted for economic reasons or to enhance their professional status, whereas women did so mainly to resolve social and personal problems or to marry non-Jews.⁷⁵ Jewish women sometimes chose Islam as a way of procuring an “automatic divorce” from an undesirable husband. Maimonides’s placement of Christianity closer to idolatry and Islam to monotheism must have been one of the other reasons Jewish conversion to Islam rather than to Christianity was easier in pre-modern times.

Examining the southeastern European Christian cases, for example, Minkov found that there was a rising trend in conversion accounts by the second half of the seventeenth century. He also claims that conversions were the result not of economic need so much as a way for elites and their follower to enhance their status and ensure social advancement.⁷⁶ Some of these converts maintained their original faiths in secret. As discussed in Chapter 5, these mass conversions paved the way for the rise of crypto-Christian communities in the Balkans and Anatolia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Hoping to find traces of Sabbatean-related conversions, I examined the Jewish conversion pattern in the seventeenth century, as reflected in the Hasköy, Edirne, and Rumeli Kazaskerliği court records. The number of converts appearing in the Hasköy records between 1600 and 1666 is thirty, related to Jews, out of 100 total cases. Between 1666 and 1676 the figure is five of fifty cases, and between 1676 and 1700 there are sixty-two of 500 cases. In these records, only a few cases openly state the religious origin of the converts, but given the dominant Jewish population in Hasköy and the fact that the cases under review are all related to Jews, we can surmise that many of those converts were of Jewish origin.⁷⁷ In the Edirne and Rumeli Kazaskerliği court records, we observe a slight increase in the number of converts in the 1670s onward, in line with the claims of other studies on the subject.

Based on these figures, we arrive at several conclusions. The first is that there is no indication of a dramatic increase in Jewish conversion during Aziz Mehmet’s lifetime. Second, the number of converts in the last quarter of the seventeenth

⁷⁴ An Ottoman document from the beginning of the twentieth century gives a hint that Jewish conversion on a voluntary basis continued until the end of the Ottoman Empire: “Dudu binti Estergo, who was of the Jewish *millet*, and lived in K. neighborhood in Salonica converted to Islam. Her conversion was not out of force or encouragement but her will. While the spiritual head of her religion (*mezheb*) was present, she was named as Zekiye. 14 September 1904.” BOA, TFR.I. SL. 57/5661.

⁷⁵ Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky, “Jewish Converts to Islam and Christianity in the Ottoman Empire in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond*, ed. Minna Rozen (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, 2002), 83–103.

⁷⁶ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, introduction.

⁷⁷ Here are the names of some Jewish converts in the seventeenth century: “Fatma Hatun bint Abdullah, who was the elder daughter of Sarabola” (İŞSA Hasköy # 3/80); “Haymiye Hatun bint Abdullah, the wife of Menahem v. Samuel” (İŞSA Hasköy # 8/51); “Abdullah, the son of David v. Salomon” (İŞSA Hasköy # 11/260); “Ibrahim b. Abdullah, the husband of Horsila bint Samuel” (İŞSA Hasköy # 17/39); “Ibrahim b. Abdullah, the husband of Vida bint Isak” (İŞSA Hasköy # 17/46); “Huseyin b. Mehmet, the son of Rabbi Yomtov b. Isak” (İŞSA Hasköy # 14/50).

century rose slightly and this fits into the general conversion pattern of the time in the empire. Third, the economic and social ties between converts and their former communities continued even among the next generation family members.

The most frequently used names for the male converts were Mehmet, Ali, Osman, Omer, Ibrahim, Mustafa, Ahmet, Hüseyin, and Hasan. And the most frequently used names for the females were Ayşe and Fatima; the former was the wife of the Prophet Muhammad and the latter was his daughter. It should be noted that Sabbatai was named Mehmet and his wives Fatima and Ayşe, and that fit perfectly with Ottoman naming practices for converts. It is also interesting that despite the rabbinical condemnation of the name of Sabbatai, the Ottoman Jews freely used the name both before and after the Sabbatean movement.⁷⁸ It is most likely that some of these mentioned converts were Sabateans, for every conversion case needed to be registered at the court.

The Exiled Messiah

While Sabbatai continued his activities in Edirne, Istanbul, and Salonica, long-standing conflicts on the Ottomans' northern border prompted them to wage war against the Poles in the spring of 1672. Encouraged by the capture of Crete in 1669, the Ottoman army set out on a campaign with Sultan Mehmet IV at its head. Not only were the sultan and the grand vizier present, but Vani Efendi and the sheikhulislam accompanied the troops. Edirne was once again entrusted to the hands of the Kaimmakam Kara Mustafa Pasha.

Aziz Mehmet left for Istanbul with three of his courtiers in mid-August, 1672. In Istanbul, the first thing he asked from the Ottoman authorities was to protect him from being insulted by the Jews, since they did everything possible to make him feel unwelcome in their city. Despite the opposition, he visited synagogues in Galata, Üsküdar, and Balat. Once Galland saw him parading the streets with thirty new converts and entering a synagogue. There, he prayed first in Hebrew and then in Turkish, with both the Talmud and the Qur'an in his hand.⁷⁹

Sabbatai's *avodot zarot* (strange acts) created problems even among his believers in the town. For example, Abraham Yakini reports that one of his devotees accused him of having committed adultery with his fiancé and of making her pregnant. Although Sabbatai denied the charges, the newborn baby boy came to be known as "Sabbatai's son,"⁸⁰ and in his later years

⁷⁸ For example, Sabbatai v. Ilys in 1640 (İSSA Hasköy # 5/220); Sabbatai v. Mihail in 1679 (İSSA Hasköy # 10/82); Sabbatai v. Hitane in 1684 (İSSA Hasköy # 11/172).

⁷⁹ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, I: 171.

⁸⁰ Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 879. According to Yakhini, Sevi married this woman, who was betrothed to another man. This was obviously adultery in Jewish law and yet another example of antinomian Sabbatean sexual practices. It was also rumored that while he was in Izmir, Sevi demanded that his followers bring him their virgin daughters but he sent them back a few days later without having touched them. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 434. A similar accusation was leveled against a Karakas Dönme leader by another Dönme in the 1950s. See Rifat Bali, "Nazif Ozge Kimdir?" *Tarih ve Toplum* (July 2002): 15–22.

Sabbatai came to accept the child as his.⁸¹ Upon several complaints originating from the Jewish authorities, the head of city security, the *bostancıbaşı*, started to monitor Sabbatai's activities in Istanbul.⁸² One evening, this official heard noises in a house in the Kuruçeşme neighborhood by the Bosphorus. When he broke into the house, he found that Sabbatai and several of his followers were singing the Psalms, with the company of "women and wine." This perhaps was the very first rumor/allegation about Sabbatean erotic mysticism or the mystical sexual orgy, accusations that have continued to be heard periodically up to the present. At the time, it was enough of a reason to have him arrested on the spot.

In the meantime, the cannons boomed and tambourines played in Istanbul announcing the news of military victories on the Polish borders.⁸³ By conquering and annexing Kamienicz and Podolia—the last major Ottoman military victory in Europe—the empire reached its widest border in its history. It had only been a few weeks since Sabbatai's arrival in Istanbul and exactly six years after his conversion to Islam. Sevi was bound and sent to Edirne before the army returned from the war. He was imprisoned in the Orta Kapu (Middle Gate) where he had been held to await his trial six years previously. We know almost nothing about how he spent his prison days. In a note from the grand vizier to the *bostancıbaşı* of Istanbul dated November 26, 1672, we learn that Sevi pleaded his innocence:

My exalted Bostancıbaşı Agha, in your previous letter, you let us know that several unbiased Muslims heard a Jew, who was dressed in Islamic cloth, and who was still imprisoned in Edirne, uttering blasphemous words, and if necessary, they were ready to testify about him, even coming to Edirne [to do so]. The aforementioned imprisoned renegade sent a petition of complaint to the military camp, stating that he was innocent and a victim. Let the Muslims who heard those words come to Edirne so that they can testify and the [issue] might be resolved in accordance with the Sharia.⁸⁴

The letter confirms that the *bostancıbaşı* had arrested Sabbatai on the basis of the testimonies of Muslim eyewitnesses who saw him uttering blasphemous words (*elfaz-i küfür*) and complaints arriving from the Jewish community. What is more important is that the vizier still calls him a Jew and a renegade (*merdud*). The aforementioned Ottoman mystic, Lari Mehmet, was executed

⁸¹ This child by the name of Abraham was mentioned by Sevi in his letter to his last father-in-law, Joseph Philosophos. Cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 889.

⁸² Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, I: 212.

⁸³ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, I: 182–183.

⁸⁴ Uriel Heyd, "A Turkish Document Concerning Sabbatai Sevi" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 25 (1956): 337–339. The letter is undated but was signed as having been written in Pravdi, a village, located on the west of Varna [in present-day Bulgaria]. The Ottoman army stopped for only one day in Pravdi. See Abdi Pasha, *Vekayinname*, 123b–124a. The previous letter in the collection was dated November 26, 1672, and signed in Pravdi, proving that the letter must have been written on the same date.

in 1664, and another mystic, Karabaş Ali Efendi, was banished to Limnos in 1679, on the *elfaz-i küfür*, i.e. heresy, charge.⁸⁵ In some cases, similar criminals were sent to be galley slaves.⁸⁶ Those blasphemous words could have been anything that could be perceived as anti-Islamic, and their interpretation could have varied in accordance with the political and cultural context of the time.

Could Aziz Mehmet or his convert followers have taken the risk of reconverting to Judaism? This is highly unlikely, since apostasy was punishable by death under Ottoman law until 1844 (see Chapter 7). Sasportas relates that in 1669 several members of the group who apostatized with the messiah and married “gentile” women in Constantinople had “repented of their error” and returned to Judaism. However, they had to flee to the border of Wallachia near Poland.⁸⁷ A fatwa issued by Sheikhulislam Minkarizade, one of the major actors in the Sabbatean affair, is quite clear about what could have happened to someone who dared to apostatize.

Question: If Zeyd, after being ennobled by [the religion of] Islam, God forbid, apostasies (*murted*), what needs to be done to Zeyd? Answer: Islam is offered to him. His doubts are to be asked [and answered]. If he does not obey, he gets imprisoned for three days. If he persists with his new religion, he gets executed.⁸⁸

Islamic law is very sensitive about apostasy, so much so that even a drunk person who converts to Islam without being fully conscious of his or her decision is considered to be a regular convert, and hence his apostasy is subject to the same law. As reflected in Minkarizade’s several other fatwas, “apostates” were not to be immediately executed. Rather, they were questioned and encouraged to re-embrace Islam. If they insisted on their decision, only then were they subject to capital punishment. A few reconversion accounts illustrate the Ottoman attitude toward apostates. M. d’Aignan, a French Catholic priest who converted to Islam in August 1672, regretted his decision a few days later and sought out a way to return to Christianity. When he heard that some priests were coming from Jerusalem, he approached them and said that if his confession were accepted, he would step on his turban in public. His confession was accepted, and as promised, he stepped on his turban in a public place, shouting that he was a Christian and wanted to die a Christian.

⁸⁵ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 143b.

⁸⁶ For example, Ali b. Şaban, who uttered “blasphemous words,” was asked to renew his faith and was put in galley on September 5, 1563. Muhammed b. Abdullah, the convert was reported to have been an apostate. Upon questioning, he confessed that he had become a Muslim out of fear for his life, but still was condemned to a galley. See Mehmet İpsirli, “XV. Asrin İkinci Yarısında Kürek Cezası ile İlgili Hükümler,” *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* (1982): 203–248.

⁸⁷ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 825. Moses Harari would be another example of reconversion in Leghorn, Italy. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 890. Solomon Aalion was another Sabbatean who returned to Judaism in Europe. See Matt Goldish, “An Historical Irony: Solomon Aalion’s Court Tries the Case of a Repentant Sabbatean,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 27 (1993): 5–12.

⁸⁸ Minkarizade Yahya Efendi, *Fetevay-i Minkarizade Efendi* (Şüleymaniye Library, MS. Hamidiye 610), 99a.

The authorities captured him and flogged him, reminding him that it was he who had wanted to convert. He was decapitated three days later since he insisted on not returning to Islam.⁸⁹ Another tragic reconversion story is about a Greek boy. While they were playing, a few Turkish lads were teasing him about his ability to read Turkish, by showing him a passage, which has a *shahada* on it. When the boy read it, they immediately labeled him a Muslim convert and brought him to the Kaimmakam, who had him circumcised and outfitted him with a turban. The convert, however, insisted that he wanted to remain a Christian. He was flogged, but he persisted in his demand, and then the case was taken to the higher court in Istanbul. Although the Kadi of Istanbul ruled that the conversion was null, since it happened against his will, the Kaimmakam did not accept the ruling and sent the “stubborn” convert to be executed.⁹⁰ Dr. Covel’s account of another religious reversion contains information about the activities of the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans in the empire, but also mentions the danger of meddling in cases of conversion or religious reversion in the empire.⁹¹

Within this religious and political context, the reversion of a famous man like Aziz Mehmet and his followers to Judaism would not have allowed them to escape the penalty of capital punishment. Although there are some curious individual exceptions such as Sabbatai’s brother, Elijah,⁹² this general Ottoman principle prevented the Sabbatean believers from reverting to their previous faith, both before and after the death of the messiah.

Aziz Mehmet sent his petition for forgiveness from the prisons, via his brother, to the sultan.⁹³ He must have signed the petition as “Bende-i Mehmet (your slave, Mehmet),” since every petition to the sultan was signed in this manner. He was put on trial in Edirne only a few days after arrival of the victorious sultan. He was once more in front of the sultan, the grand vizier, Vani Efendi, and, most likely, Kaimmakam Mustafa and the new sheikhulislam, Çatalcalı Ali Efendi.⁹⁴ According to Galland’s informant, a French-speaking Jew named Mose, the witnesses were brought to Edirne bound and gagged. The witnesses accused Aziz Mehmet of praying with people who had their skull caps, *kippas*, and prayer shawls, *tefillin*, on, and drinking wine in

⁸⁹ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, 174.

⁹⁰ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, 176. Again, another Greek boy was put in prison for three months and flogged many times since he did not accept conversion to Islam, and he was finally put to the sword on September 27, 1672. De la Croix, *La Turquie Chretienne sous la Puissante Protection de Louis le Grand* (Paris, 1695), 327, 379.

⁹¹ Dr. Covel’s Diary, 210.

⁹² Scholem tells that Elijah returned to Judaism after the death of Sabbatai and succeeded in reestablishing himself in Izmir as a respected member of the community. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 822.

⁹³ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, 211.

⁹⁴ Minkarizade left his post due to his illness in 1671 and was replaced by one of his students, Çatalcalı Ali Efendi (1631–1692).

the company of women.⁹⁵ Based on this testimony, Aziz Mehmet was found guilty. Galland says that he was going to be executed, but since the sentencing and execution date fell at the beginning of the fasting month, Ramadan, the execution was postponed. The Turks, Galland says, were careful not to spill blood during the month of Ramadan. With the mediation of the sultan once again, his sentence was changed to banishment.⁹⁶ When Ramadan was over in the middle of January 1673, Aziz Mehmet was banished to Dulcigno (present-day Ulcinj, in Montenegro), accompanied by a few of his believers.⁹⁷

Unlike the previous sedition, heresy, and apostasy cases that we mentioned, Aziz Mehmet's story did not end with execution. Despite the fact that he was confirmed to have defiled Islam time and again, he never claimed that he gave up on Islam, or converted to another religion. Most probably, this attitude prevented him from being executed, as the general tendency in Ottoman law was to refrain from implementing capital punishment if the "culprit" was not persistent in his allegations.

The Dead Messiah?

In January 1673, Sabbatai Sevi, his wife, Sarah, his son, Ismail, and his daughter were on their way to exile in Dulcigno under the escort of Ottoman guards.⁹⁸ Dulcigno, also called Ülgün by the Ottomans, was a small town located in a very remote corner of the empire, where almost no Jews lived. Having few, if any, Jews in the town was in line with the nature of the punishment, since the idea of the exile was to cut off the criminal's relation with his former community members. Many Sabbateans called the town by the biblical name Alkum.

It is not known how many people were in the convoy or how long it took them to get to Dulcigno. There is no doubt that Sabbatai's journey generated great excitement as he passed through these Balkan cities, in which messianic fervor was still very much alive. But traveling from one city to the next via forested mountains in winter must have been an arduous odyssey indeed. There were major roads leading from Salonica to Eastern Europe: one through the province of Bosnia; another through Bulgaria by Widin; and a third that deviates from the last at the city of Sophia, leading in the direction of Belgrade.

⁹⁵ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, 211. A court record from the same period shows that similar "crimes" were treated in the same manner. Some Muslims, Jews, and other *dhimmis* in Hasköy were found drinking alcohol in their houses, where there was also music and dancing; as that was considered a source of sedition, they were tried in the imperial court (Hasköy # 10/125).

⁹⁶ Galland, *Istanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, II: 22.

⁹⁷ Galland and De la Croix claim that Sabbatai was banished to Morea. Relying on them, Hammer and Heyd also reported that he was banished to Morea. This could not be possible since Sabbatai's family was originally from Morea, and banishing him to Morea where there were many Jews would go against the idea of banishment. De la Croix says that Sevi was banished to "Dulcigno castle in Morea." De la Croix, *Memoirs*, 384. There is a possibility that the entire Adriatic shore might have been called Morea in the seventeenth century.

⁹⁸ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfasi."

The Bosnian route was relatively less frequented as it was so mountainous. Since Dulcigno is in the same direction as the province of Bosnia, the convoy probably took the road through Bosnia, and the journey must have taken nearly one month.⁹⁹ On the way, they must have passed through Salonica, Monastir, Ioannina, Ohrida, Elbasan, and Berat, where considerable numbers of Jews were living. Ioannina had the largest Jewish population in the Balkans after Salonica. The closest town to Dulcigno with a Jewish community was the prosperous town of Berat. Evliya Çelebi likens the town to the legendary “Irem gardens.”¹⁰⁰ Once he arrived, Aziz Mehmet was confined to Dulcigno Castle, where Cervantes had once been held captive by the Ottomans for five years. From later accounts, we understand that he was not put in a dungeon in the castle, but was a *kalebend* who was able to move freely within the castle grounds, even sometimes in the town. The fact that his family joined him in Dulcigno is yet more proof that he was not a regular prisoner. Evliya Çelebi describes Sabbatai’s new habitat and the town as the abode of pirates and a center of commerce.

The fortress was built by the Spanish infidels and was the personal possession of their chief cardinal. The Venetians later took it over by a ruse. In 1478 they delivered its keys to Hersekoglu Ahmed Pasha, the vizier of Mehmet the Conqueror. . . . Mehmet Khan in turn registered it as the *khas* of the sancak-beg of Shkoder. It is now administered by a *voyvoda* and has a *kadi* with a salary level of 150 aspers. . . . It is well-maintained and embellished with towers, ramparts, serrated battlements, embrasures, loopholes, and moats, and is furnished with all major supplies. Inside are the mosque of Sultan Mehmet the conqueror and small houses for garrison troops. . . . The castle wardens reside in a loggia in front of the gate and 700 Albanian ghazis stand guard along with the garrison troops, brave and doughty warriors all. . . . There are 20 frigates in the harbor, as the fortress is situated on the coast. The Albanians here and from other towns take to their frigates and plunder infidel territory, burning and destroying, then return to Ülgün with rich booty and choice captives, and give one-tenth of the spoils to the sancak-beg.¹⁰¹

In this “international” location, Sabbatai spent his days yearning to meet his people, and probably hoping one day to return to Salonica or Edirne. The local population, who were mostly Bektashis,¹⁰² treated him as a scholar and

⁹⁹ Traveling in Albania in 1838, Best journeyed from Ioannina to Salonica in eight days. J. J. Best, *Excursions in Albania thence to Thessalonica & Constantinople* (London: H. Allen, 1842), 341. The distance from Edirne to Salonica is the same as the distance from Ioannina to Salonica, and the distance from Salonica to Dulcigno is almost twice as far as the distance from Ioannina to Salonica. Therefore, we can surmise that Sabbatai’s convoy arrived at their destination almost a month after setting out. As the convoy traveled in the winter, the journey could have taken even longer. A Dönme tradition reasonably reports that it took forty-two days for Yakub Çelebi to travel from Salonica to Dulcigno to visit Aziz Mehmet. Oruç, “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?” May 26, 1927.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Dankoff and Robert Elsie, *Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions*, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 111 and 126.

¹⁰¹ Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Albania*, 53.

¹⁰² For the Bektashis of Albania, see Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultan*, II: 536–551.

mystic who was banished due to political reasons. It was not difficult for Aziz Mehmet to communicate with the Bektashis, since he was already familiar with this tradition. He had a Turkish helper named Molla Ali. We have little information about the identity of this person, but he was the one who carried the messages and letters of Aziz Mehmet to other towns.

After the exile of the “messiah,” the Sabbatean believers dispersed widely, but messianic expectations and dreams of redemption never ceased among them. Samuel Primo, Abraham Yakhini, Nathan of Gaza, Abraham Cuenque, Israel Hazzan, Baruch of Arezzo, Meir Rofe, and Abraham Revigo each went to different Jewish communities. The first year of exile was a waiting period for the believers, one in which they expected at any moment to hear the good tidings of Aziz Mehmet’s imminent redemption. But, once again, they were disappointed. Although some of his believers wanted to visit him in exile, he only allowed those who had received his personal invitation. Among the invitees were Shemaya de Mayo, Meir Rofe, Samuel Gandoor, Samuel Primo, and Nathan of Gaza. Throughout the exile, he remained subject to drastic mood swings ranging from utter disappointment and depression to utmost happiness and optimism. The visitors, messengers, and letters he received were the main vehicles through which he conveyed his messages to his believers, scattered all over the Ottoman Empire and Europe.

A year after he was exiled in Dulcigno, he wrote a letter to his believers, asking them to stop calling him messiah, the king, or similar epithets, but only “Rabbi” (*haham*) or “brother.” This was almost akin to what he had said to the Ottoman authorities in his defense during the trials: he was just a rabbi! He still entertained the hope of returning from exile and did not want to have any additional problems with the Ottoman or Jewish authorities. Instead he was suggesting, even urging, that his believers bury the faith of *tiqqun* in their hearts for the time being.

This is a writing of AMIRA about fasting that will return on the 22nd of Kislev, in the year of 1674 /Brothers and loved ones and my teachers and believers who exist in each and every place, a place where I am dust/ at your feet and I am addressing you, having this request/ that I ask from you that, you will cut off branches of my faith entirely until / nothing will be left but the root buried inside your hearts because/ this is what my soul wanted and agreed when I discovered that there is no mending, *tiqqun*, of this hope of mine/ to realize soon unless this will not be done / and this is, you will cancel the End of Days the Holy Day *Tisha-be'Av*, in every matter and you will return / to do *tisha-be'Av* itself it is the custom of your ancestors entirely to fast in suffering/ is on my head and also you will do the other suffering (*ta'aniyot*) that is the custom of your ancestors entirely/ nowhere will you address me as a king and you will not mention me as “our Messiah”/ and not as “Our King” or “Our Lord” not orally and not in writing but you will mention me as “Haham S.Z.,” may he be protected, this way/ no more will you say, “Oh! The beloved” and those who write me, should write “my brother”/ “my beloved Haham Rabbi S.Z” or just nothing. And nobody will say that he will

kiss my feet or / or my hands or similar speech, and nobody will send me a present / even food or drink and nobody will fight or quarrel with his friends/ over this faith at all. And all those who are in exile and had been dispossessed from their home/ for this faith will strive very much to return to their homes/ as much as they can and any other thing that resembles / the root of this faith, remove it entirely. Bury my faith/ very much. Please loved ones and friends, comply!/ This is my wish and my soul agreed strongly. God, may He be praised,/ will have mercy upon you soon, he will show you the great desire which you were desiring to attain/ it is very good that you will do this thing and if not, God forbid, nothing will get realized. You will be subjected to a lie like the rest of our brothers who believed/ you will rest from this leprosy, this is a lie/ like the rest of our brothers who believed, God forbid, and I will rest, covered by my leprosy, and chain/and if there would right and you will see the essence because like your faith/ I will give you an advantage since my tortured in bitterness soul/ you will have pity on it and you will want it . . . I am your humble and young slave from among all beings, S.Z./¹⁰³

Among his last visitors were Joseph Philosophos and a few other Sabbatean elders from Salonica where the Dönme community was then in the making. Joseph Philosophos was a leading rabbi in the city and one of the disciples of Nathan. In the meantime, Sarah died in 1674, and Sevi was betrothed to the daughter of a rabbi from Sofia, but this marriage was never consummated for the girl died before she came to Sabbatai.¹⁰⁴ After this, he asked the Philosophos family to convert to Islam so that he could marry his daughter. The Philosophos family converted, and the father was renamed Abdulgaffar Efendi b. Abdullah, the son became Yakub b. Abdullah (Jacob Querido or Yakub Çelebi), and the daughter, Ester, took the name Ayşe b. Abdullah. The father sent his daughter, accompanied with his son, to Dulcigno, and the marriage took place in 1675.¹⁰⁵ Now Sabbatai had contracted his fifth and final marriage. Dönme tradition called the wife by her original name, Jochebed [Yocheved?], while Sabbatai, in a short letter to Joseph Philosophos, calls his wife “my wife Hadassah Mikhal, who is Esther, my sister, my love, my undefiled and her two sons Ishmael and Abraham.” The letter was written in the spring of 1676 and signed “the Messiah of the God of Israel and Judah.”¹⁰⁶ The signature indicates that he had regained his morale after having asked his believers to “bury my faith” the previous year.

Shortly after Passover in 1676, Sabbatai sent more letters and notes to the Jewish communities in other cities. From one of the letters shortly before his

¹⁰³ I use Scholem's translation of the letter with small revisions. For analysis of the letter, see Abraham Elqayam, "Bury My Faith: A Letter from Sabbatai Sevi in Exile" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* (1995): 4–36.

¹⁰⁴ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 850–851.

¹⁰⁵ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfasi."

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by Baruch of Arezzo, cited in Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 889.

death, we can understand another aspect of his inner life. The letter has two parts, the second of which seems to be the copy of a previous circular letter, written to different communities, including the one in Sofia.¹⁰⁷ In this letter, addressed to “all men of faith in Sofia,” he says that he sent them a messenger, who was going to announce to them of all his glory in Egypt.¹⁰⁸ They need to obey the messenger in anything he says unto them in his name. He also attributes to himself a certain divinity, by saying “for beside me there is no God.” If they obey the messenger, he promised them that he shall go up and fill their treasure. Then he signed the letter “the anointed of the God of Israel and Judah, Sabbatai Mehmet Sevi.”

The first part of the letter contains an even briefer note addressed to the believers in Berat, asking them to “hurry up and send” him “a prayer book for Rosh ha-Shana and Yom-Kippur.” This time he signs the note “the Messiah of the God of Israel and Judah, Sabbatai Sevi.” To this note he attached another letter ordering the believers to listen to the messenger he is sending. He does not hesitate to repeat the same phrases including “for beside me there is no God,” a phrase that would put him in the long Halladjian tradition of the Sufi mystics who had uttered the statement of “*Ana al-Haqq* (I am the Truth/God).” It seems that toward the end of his life he had internalized the idea of self-deification. This time he signs the letter “Sabbatai Sevi” again.

One wonders why Sabbatai had waited until then to get a copy of a prayer book. Perhaps remembering the Kuruçeşme incident, when he was arrested on the grounds that he had indulged in “heretical” practices, he must have thought that he should abstain from any visible activities. Since he was being exiled as punishment for a crime, he must have been under scrutiny at the time, and he had to be careful about his actions. We do not know whether he received this prayer book, since he died shortly after his request.

In his very last days, it seems that Sabbatai’s hopes for salvation from exile and for the ultimate redemption of his people were again at a new low point. Karillo and another convert visited him on September 5, 1676, twelve days before his death. Cardozo had a chance to meet this convert in 1682. According to his testimony, Sabbatai, having become despondent about an imminent redemption, took them to the shore and told them to stop believing in him, almost a reminder of the “bury my faith in your hearts” speech. He is reported to have said: “Return every man to his house. How long will you hold fast on to me? Perhaps until you can see beneath that rock on the coast?”¹⁰⁹ Because of this statement, Scholem thinks that Sevi “died in a mood of despondency,

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion on the letter, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 915.

¹⁰⁸ He writes the word *Misrayim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt, in two words: *mesar yam* (literally: sea straits). Amarillo thinks that it refers to a place by the Albanian shores. Scholem is of the opinion that he refers to Egypt, since he claims to have assumed the role of Moses. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 915.

¹⁰⁹ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 917.

conscious of his failure.” To be fair, it is hard to make this claim as this was not necessarily his permanent state of mind.

It is true that living in exile for three years left him morally exhausted and physically sick. One of the Dönme traditions recounts that he died from a high fever that lasted more than one and a half months.¹¹⁰ According to this tradition, Yakub Çelebi, who found him suffering from a high fever, was the last one to visit Sevi. He died at the age of fifty on the Day of Atonement, September 16 (or 17), 1676, exactly ten years after his conversion, with his wife next to his deathbed. According to another legend, he went into a cave and vanished or ascended to heaven. Baruch Arezzo relates that he called for his brother, his wife, and the rabbis who were with him a few days before his vanishing, and told them: “I am going to die on the Day of Atonement, at the time of *ne’ilah*. Take me to the cave by the shore that I prepared for myself. On the third day, let my brother come to the cave.” When his brother went to the cave, dragons were guarding the gates. Once inside, he found the cave empty. “Neither Our Lord nor anything else was in the cave, but it was full of light.”¹¹¹

An interesting Ottoman document, signed by the chief commander (*dizdar*) of the castle in Dulcigno, and dated October 27, 1676, strongly suggest that Sevi was on the Ottoman payroll until his death. In the document, the commander says that Mehmet was deceased (*muteveffa*) and his salary was discontinued.¹¹² This indicates, contrary to our assumptions, that Sevi did not necessarily fall totally out of favor with the Ottoman authorities after his exile.

The death of the messiah was the next great shock and paradox for the believers after his conversion. Many of them, including Nathan, kept the news secret for a while and remained silent about it until they came up with the idea that it was not a “real death.” Within a few years, as discussed in the next chapter, the Sabbatean doctrine of occultation was fully developed by the believers. Cardozo was in Edirne when he heard the news. He went to Rabbi Jacob Ashkenazi, and said to him: “Sabbatai Zevi is dead. What says Your Worship to that?” And he somewhat ironically replied: “If Sabbatai Sevi is dead, you had best find yourself another God.”¹¹³

Aziz Mehmet was officially Muslim, and thus he should have had a regular Muslim funeral ceremony and been buried where he had died. While Ben Zvi claimed that his burial place was in Berat, many other scholars (including Scholem) think that his burial place was in Dulcigno.¹¹⁴ When Mustafa Efendi,

¹¹⁰ Oruç, “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?” May 26, 1927.

¹¹¹ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 919–920. De la Croix claims that some of his believers thought he went into occultation on September 10. De la Croix, *Memoirs*, 384.

¹¹² BOA, KK, #3418, p. 51 and BOA, KK, #3417, vr. 26b. Cited in Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih*, 151 and 170.

¹¹³ Abraham Miguel Cardozo, *Selected Writings*, tr. David Halperin (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 280.

¹¹⁴ Yitshak Ben-Zvi, “The Place of the Sabbatai Sevi’s Tomb, and the Sabbatean Sect in Albania,” in his *Studies and Documents* (Jerusalem, 1966), 545–555. This claim is now being repeated by the contemporary Berat municipality as well. In the official websites of the town, it states that near the Halveti convent in the city was the grave of Sevi.

the successor of Yakub Çelebi, was performing his pilgrimage in Mecca in the 1690s, he met pilgrims from Dulcigno, who had good memories of Aziz Mehmet and related stories about his shrine.¹¹⁵ Writing about the “credulity and vain hopes of the Jews,” Basnage tells that the Sabbatean believers had been visiting Aziz Mehmet’s tomb, and even “speaking to the tomb.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, a short article in 1880 indicates that the elders in Dulcigno reported anonymous visitors who came to visit the grave of an unknown “holy man” and put flowers and stones on it.¹¹⁷ Apparently, his tomb, similar to his house in Izmir, was turned into a *lieu de memoir* by his believers in the coming centuries.

There are, however, several tombs ascribed to Aziz Mehmet in Albania and Montenegro today. They are all publicly known as Sufi shrines and revered by the local Muslims. Hasluck notes that Christian and Muslim “sanctuaries” could become “ambiguous,” and this ambiguity allowed them to be used as numinous sites by the people of both confessions.¹¹⁸ This was apparently the case for Sabbatai’s sanctuary. There have been several attempts to ascertain the location of the tomb, but no one has succeeded conclusively. There is even a local legend, stating that Sevi moved to Tomor, a place in the north of Albania, at a later stage of his life and died there. Today, there is a small Dönme community there who revere the shrine called Aziz Mehmet Efendi Türbesi, which is also visited by the local Muslims. Given the state of the research at this point, I have a tendency to accept Schwartz’s assumption. To him, the most likely site for the burial place is the shrine called Murat Dede Türbesi in Dulcigno. The contemporary keeper of the shrine, however, insists that it is the shrine of an Albanian saint, not that of Sevi.¹¹⁹ I myself heard from a Dulcigno resident who said that this “Murat Dede Türbesi” could have been the shrine since the local people had been referring to it as a shrine of someone “who was Muslim by day and Jewish by night.”

When the funeral ceremony was over, Sabbatai Mehmet Sevi’s brother Elijah took Sabbatai’s wife and children to Salonica and then to Edine. While Sabbatai was in exile, most of his believers began to assemble in Salónica, a city that served as the major center for Sabbatean activities until the early twentieth century. As the “failure of prophecy” arguments suggest, his death did not bring any “disconfirmation” to the believers’ faith because, a priori, they had not put a price on its historical success.

¹¹⁵ Oruç, “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?” May 30, 1927.

¹¹⁶ De Beauval J. Basnage, *Histoire Juives depuis Jesus Christ jusqu’au Present* (Rotterdam: A La Haye, 1716), XIV: 788.

¹¹⁷ Anonymous, “Das Grab in Dulcigno,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 39 (1880): 620–621.

¹¹⁸ Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, II: 570.

¹¹⁹ Stephen Schwartz, *Sarajevo Rose: A Balkan Jewish Notebook* (London: Saqi, 2005), 223.

Authority, Authenticity, and Leadership

Failed Prophecy and the Emergence of Post-Messianic Sects in the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe

SABBATAI MEHMED SEVI DIED without leaving his followers a decisive clarification of his messianic status. By the time he died, far from his family and friends in an obscure part of northern Albania, his complex legacy had already begun to be contested among both the small number of Muslim converts and the large number of Jewish crypto-Sabbateans. This complexity stemmed not only from different interpretations of the Sabbatean belief system but also from the community's new lifestyle and survival strategies after the failure of repeated prophecies. News about the death of the messiah reached the other Sabbatean communities in a few months. Many believers, including Nathan, preferred not to talk about it for a while. This state of mind was perhaps the real beginning of the *burden of silence*.

Prior to Sabbatai's death, the belief in a living messiah and a charismatic leader was a sufficient bond to hold the believers together, since the possibility of the messiah's takeover and fulfillment of the unfinished project of redemption could still come to fruition. With the death of the redeemer, these high hopes were transformed into deep anxieties. Similar to other religious and messianic groups in history, however, Sabbatai's believers devised novel strategies to survive rather than simply disappear.

The study by Festinger et al., which remains one of the most influential works on similar types of failed prophecies, can help us understand what might have happened to the Sabbatean believers after the death of their messiah.¹ The study claims that after failed prophecies or "disconfirmations,"

¹ Festinger et al. studied a flying saucer cult, whose leader told them that a big flood was going to hit the world in the 1950s, and before that event, a spaceship was going to come to save the believers. As the event had not occurred in the designated time, the group members thought that their prayers saved the world, therefore, the "end of the time" did not come. See Leon Festinger et al., *When Prophecy Fails* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).

believers experience a “cognitive dissonance” between what was expected and what really happened. To reduce this dissonance, the members of the cult increase their proselytizing efforts to ease their own disappointment. This paradigmatic work has been critically utilized in analyzing several messianic and millennial groups.²

Examining seventeen different case studies on “failed prophecies,” Dawson concluded that on the whole, Festinger et al. were right to predict that many groups would indeed survive the failure of prophecy. However, the reasons for why and how they survived are much more complicated than implied by the original study. Dawson thinks that there are at least six conditions to consider in assessing the effectiveness of adaptation strategies: group support; the role of leadership; the scope and sophistication of a group’s ideological system; the very nature of the prophecies made and the kinds of actions the prophecies inspire; the role of ritual in framing the experience of prophecy and its failure; and last, various organizational factors that condition the adaptive strategies adopted by groups and their ability to cope with prophetic disconfirmation.³ Melton develops another model that he calls “spiritualization” to explain the failed prophecies. He states that “while a group may, temporarily, assume an error in timing, *the ultimate and more permanent reconceptualization is most frequently accomplished through a process of ‘spiritualization.’*”⁴

Thinking that the approach of Festinger et al. was too positivistic and presented the subjects as irrational and driven by forces beyond their comprehension, Dein, inspired by Melton, examined the Lubavitchers;⁵ he concluded that the believers were not passive recipients of various outside forces, but rather active agents who dealt with the death of their redeemer by appealing to a number of post hoc rationalizations.⁶

The Sabbatean movement is quite different with regard to the immediate consequences of the groups studied, partly because the Sabbatean group developed—and was allowed to develop—within a more intolerant political and religious environment. Still however, the emphasis of Festinger et al. on

² Challenging Festinger, J. F. Zygmunt claims that the disconfirmation of a specific prophecy may threaten the success of a religious movement on a number of fronts. To him there are three reactions to prophetic failure: adaptation, reaffirmation, and reappraisal. See Zygmunt, “When Prophecies Fail,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 16 (1972): 245–268. Likewise, R. Balch et al. argue that there was no evidence that the failure had strengthened the members’ beliefs or pressured them to increase proselytizing. On the contrary, the disconfirmation left group members “badly shaken” and “very demoralized.” Balch, “When the Bombs Drop: Reactions to Disconfirmed Prophecy in a Millennial Sect,” *Sociological Perspective* 2 (1983): 137–158.

³ L. Dawson, “When Prophecy Fails and Faith Persists,” *Nova Religio* 3 (1999): 60–82.

⁴ J. Melton, “Spiritualization and Reaffirmation,” *American Studies* 26 (1985): 17–29.

⁵ The Lubavitchers are a branch of the Hasidic movement, founded in the late eighteenth century by Shneur Zalman in Russia. The sixth “Rebbe” Yitzchak Schneersohn settled in New York in 1940 and there started the modern movement. His son-in-law Menachem Mendel Schneersohn turned it into a powerful messianic movement. After his death, the followers, who had considered him the awaited messiah, developed a theology of the second coming and created a post-messianic community.

⁶ Simon Dein, “What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails: The Case of Lubavitch,” *Sociology of Religion* 62: 3 (2001): 383–401.

“proselytization efforts” and Melton’s model of “spiritualization” could be helpful in understanding the role of the messiah and of conversion after his death. In this process, the empirically testable belief that Sevi was the messiah had changed into a supernatural—and thus unfalsifiable—belief that he was more powerful in the spiritual world.

Inheriting a complex and “failed” messianic legacy, the Jewish and Muslim Sabbateans found themselves facing radically different possibilities with regard to their future: the Jewish Sabbateans could either admit their error and return to the Jewish fold, or remain crypto-Sabbateans among the Jews. Likewise, the Muslim Sabbateans could either leave the empire and return to Judaism, fully convert to Islam, or remain crypto-Sabbateans among the Muslims. Ten years earlier, that is, when the messiah converted to Islam in 1666, the believers, at this point all Jewish, faced the same dilemma, and most of them preferred to return to Judaism or remain as crypto-Sabbateans among the Jews. Only a small number of believers followed their messiah’s lead in adopting Islam. At the time of his death, most of the Sabbateans, who were then living primarily in Salonica, Istanbul, Edirne, and Izmir, were still Jews.

Unlike the Jewish crypto-Sabbateans, who remained isolated, individual believers within the larger Jewish fold, the Muslim crypto-Sabbateans tended, for reasons that should become obvious, to live together. Among the Muslim Sabbateans, only a few returned openly to Judaism, mostly after they left the Ottoman Empire. The rest chose to remain as secret Sabbatean believers among the Muslims. The next important issues for the Muslim Sabbateans were, first, who was going to inherit the leadership of the movement; second, how to avoid rabbinical persecution; and third, to what extent they should integrate into the larger Ottoman society. Different reactions to those issues were the main source of tension among them, leading to eventual schisms within the community of Dönme, or *maaminim*.

This period was also significant for the Ottoman Empire as a whole, since the political, religious, and ethnic matrix of the empire started to change radically after the 1680s. In 1683, in pursuit of the age-old dream of capturing the “red apple,” the lands farther west, the Ottoman armies pushed northward and westward, laying siege to Vienna, the capital of the Habsburg Empire. The campaign failed, however, after which the dynamics of the Ottomans’ relationship to the west and to its own Balkan holdings were irreversibly changed. For the European observer, this failure marked the high tide of the Turkish “menace,” and for the eastern European and Balkan Ottoman subjects, it signaled the possible end of the Pax Ottomana in the region. This perception was further confirmed in 1699, when the Ottomans confirmed the loss of large swaths of territory to Austria, Poland, Venice, and Russia in the Treaty of Carlowitz. External failures had their repercussions within the internal body politic of the empire, as well. Some immediate measures were put into effect to reverse negative outcomes of the breakdown. The grand vizier, Kara Mustafa Pasha, who had been one of the main actors in the Sabbatean affair since its inception, was decapitated as punishment for his failure in the war. Vani

Efendi, another major actor in the affair, was exiled, on the grounds that he supported and even provoked the war against the “infidels.” A few years later, in 1687, the sultan himself, after thirty-four years of rule, had to cede the throne to his brother, Suleiman II, due to the displeasure of the *ulema* and the army. Suleiman II died a few years later, and was succeeded by Sultan Mustafa I (another of Mehmet IV’s brothers), who held the throne until 1703, when the voices of the discontented culminated in the Edirne Rebellion. After this, the sultan was deposed, and for the first time in Ottoman history, a sheikhulislam, Feyzullah Efendi, who was one of the instigators of the incident, was strangled. Ahmet III (r.1703–1730), the son of Mehmet IV, was installed on the throne. This event, among others, marked the end of the so-called puritanical Kadizadelı Period. Moreover, the Ottoman palace returned from Edirne to Istanbul after almost half a century, leading to the renewed importance of the city in the eighteenth century. And unlike the oriental despotism arguments, as Quataert states, thereafter the sultan’s power and stature were so reduced that he was required to seek the advice of “interested parties and heed their council.”⁷

One of the consequences of these political developments for the Ottoman Jews was that the border between the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic worlds began to shift back and forth, especially along the borders of the Polish commonwealth, allowing an increased exchange of ideas and populations between the two worlds. The cultural and social impact of the shifting borders has yet to be studied thoroughly. Amid this chaotic political and military environment, Salonica, far away from the border and the immediate attention of Ottoman authorities, provided a relatively comfortable niche in which the Dönmes were able to develop their parallel messianic universe and also to traverse along the borders of the Ashkenazi and Sephardic worlds.

In this chapter, I recount the events that unfolded during the formative period of the Dönme community and attempt to establish a chronology of events until the 1720s when the final split within the community occurred and they divided into the three subsects of Yakubis, Karakaş, and Kapancıs. During this period, the Dönmes and Jewish Sabbateans were still in close connection with one another. There were several competing Sabbatean interpretations in circulation at first, but in the end the Dönme tradition and Kabala was established not only based on Sabbatai’s thoughts and practices, but also on those of Nathan, Cardozo, and other Dönme elders such as Yakub Çelebi and Mustafa Çelebi.

Creating a timetable for the formative period of the Dönme community is, admittedly, one of the most daunting tasks facing Sabbatean studies. As I discussed in the introduction, with a critical use of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dönme sources such as newspapers, pamphlets, poems,

⁷ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 43.

memoirs, interviews, and other oral history materials, we are in a position to establish a reasonable chronology of the early events. Landmark events such as the death of the messiah, the emergence of the new leaders, the alleged mass conversion into Islam, and splits within the community were my orientation points for interpreting other events.

Generally speaking, during the formative periods of religious communities, most members likely do not realize they are in the process of forming such a community. As the communal structure and principles begin to crystallize, the members of this community tend to invent dates with regard to the events of their early history. Such was the case with the Dönmes. Therefore, one of the other aims of this chapter is to discuss how and why an amalgamation of loosely connected individual believers was transformed into a self-conscious community of believers after the death of their messiah.

The Birth of a Post-Messianic Community: Yakubis

When a major issue emerged during Sabbatai's lifetime, it could be resolved with *ad hoc* regulations or by the direct intervention of the messiah. What was going to happen when a new problem arose in the absence of an absolute authority? Before the death of Sabbatai, the believers were convinced that it was already "the End of Days," and it was unnecessary to waste time establishing institutions or regulations to maintain a community. As time went on without the redemption coming to pass, a common fate pushed the loosely connected believers to rally around some principles that had already been implemented in an *ad hoc* fashion during the messiah's lifetime, a process that could be observed in the development of so many religions, revolved around a cultic person.

In the formative years, Salonica became the main center of Dönme activities until the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1924.⁸ According to a Karakaş tradition, in his lifetime, Sabbatai "elected" some of his followers and told them to go to Salonica and wait for the glad tidings there. The glad tidings, according to the same tradition, announced the birth of Osman Baba. Geographically and culturally, the city constituted a very suitable place for the Dönmes, in part because it was located far from the central Ottoman religious and political authorities, and in part because it contained such a large Jewish population that the city itself came to be known as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans." The choice of this place proved to be right in the long run, since the city triumphantly survived most of the military and economic disasters in the empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and remained unharmed until 1912. Had the Dönmes lived in another city, their fortune could have been entirely different in later centuries.

⁸ For a short history of the population exchange, see Mehmet Ali Gökaçtı, *Nüfus Mübadelesi* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2003).

The question of leadership and the necessity of forming a community became pressing issues after the failed redemption. Several respected leaders such as Talmudists and rabbis Joseph Philosophos, Solomon Florentin, and Brasilia were from Salonica. But none of them was recognized as the head of the community in the beginning. The Philosophos family was in the most advantageous position among the candidates, due to their connection to Sabbatai. It was not the father but his charismatic son, Yakub Çelebi (Jacob Querido), who emerged as the leader of the fledgling Dönme community.

Yakub's authority was confirmed by the testimony of his sister, Ayşe. As Rapoport-Albert states, virgin girls and widows were seen as more "credible" than married women in the rendering of prophecy in messianic environments.⁹ And, Ayşe was the sacred widow of the messiah. According to the Dönme tradition, Yakub and Ayşe were the last visitors that Sevi received in exile. Yakub returned to Salonica with a letter from Sabbatai, confirming that he was the appointed successor, *halife*, (Caliph) of the messiah. When Ayşe, accompanied by Sabbatai's brother, Elijah, returned to the city shortly after the death of the messiah, she endorsed the letter and also claimed that the soul of the messiah had transmigrated to her brother. Cardozo reports that Ayşe and her brother confined themselves in a house for three days; at the end of the period she proclaimed that her brother had been born anew, with the messianic soul of Sabbatai.¹⁰ Despite some resistance, the content of the letter was approved by the elders, and Yakub was proclaimed Sabbatai's successor. As a result of further debates, a small number of dissenters left Salonica for Izmir. Raising the arguments later echoed by the Kapancı group, which would break off and establish themselves almost three decades later, the dissenters were of the opinion that Sabbatai was going to return for the second time shortly; therefore, appointing a successor to him would be tantamount to blasphemy.

In the meantime, the believers were under close scrutiny by Jews and Muslims. To Jews, they were heretics, and to Muslims, they were insincere converts. As Yalman states, initially, "two-hundred families were in total confusion. They assembled not because of internal coherence but because of external pressure."¹¹ Yakub Çelebi and the elders had to find new strategies for dispelling the clouds of suspicion over the community. As prescribed in Dönme communal regulations, the Eighteen Commandments, they decided to be more rigorous in participating in the public Islamic practices, such as attending prayers in mosques and the Sufi convents, and performing the pilgrimage. Funerals in particular were carefully organized to prove that they were living a proper Islamic lifestyle.

⁹ Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On the Position of Women in Sabbatianism," in *Ha-Halom ve-Shivro*, ed. Rachel Elior (Jerusalem: Hug le-Mahshevet Yisrael, 2000), 143–327.

¹⁰ Cardozo, *Selected Writings*, 87.

¹¹ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfası."

With firmer establishment of the group's leadership, the community's internal structure and principles were now evolving. As the "failed prophecy" literature suggests, the believers had to find ways to resolve the cognitive dissonance that they were experiencing. By fusing the ideas of Sabbatai, Nathan, Cardozo, the Dönme elders developed a hybrid and yet systematic theology over time. According to this theology, the messiah did not die but vanished from ordinary human sight, going into a sort of occultation, from which he would return and complete his mission when the time was ripe. The process of crafting this theology showed striking similarities to the history of early Christianity and Shiism, whose believers carefully developed a theology of occultation and of a second coming during a time of persecution and travail. All of these religious movements gave rise to a mystical faith that, while using a definite historical event as its point of reference, nevertheless drew its strength from the paradoxical character of the event.

To help the messiah bring about the redemption and to hasten his return, the Dönmes felt obliged to take on messianic responsibilities, some of which were described in the Eighteen Commandments and Credo, as discussed in the next chapter. Besides these precepts, additional communal organizations and regulations concerning daily affairs of the believers, as well as such matters as legal issues, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and communal solidarity, were established in the early years of Yakub's stewardship. Oruç's following portrayal of the early years is, I believe, closer to reality, as this information could be corroborated by several other oral traditions:

Yakub Çelebi first formed an administrative committee, so that he could place community members under control. Problems that occurred between the members were to be settled by this committee. He organized the [community's] marriage affairs as well: No one could get married without the permission of the community leader. . . . Divorce was strictly forbidden. He organized the inheritance issues and made sure that the wives got equal shares from the inheritance. He valued the communal solidarity chest above everything. Everyone was to contribute to the chest in accordance with their income. The inheritance of widows and orphans were to be administered by a protector in the name of the committee. . . . When the young ones reached the age of 18, they would kiss the hand of the leader, and be exposed to the secrets of the tribe in a special ceremony.¹²

Despite the resistance against Yakub's leadership, his role in creating a self-sufficient community was indisputable. What Paul was to Christianity, Yakub was to the Dönmes. During his time, a loosely connected group of people overcame the trauma of a dead messiah and transformed themselves into a self-conscious messianic community, with a new theology, Commandments, and institutions. Through these activities, Yakub institutionalized the *burden of silence*. Although the community was divided into subsects within

¹² Oruç, "Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?" May 25, 1927.

three decades, they utilized the same Commandments and institutions with some revisions in later centuries.

Jewish Sabbateans among the Dönmes

Since Sabbatai asked only a small number of believers to convert to Islam, by the time he died, most of his believers were still in the Jewish fold. At that point in time, one of the major differences between the Dönmes and the Jewish Sabbateans is that Jewish Sabbateans tended to live isolated crypto-Sabbatean lives within their own Jewish communities whereas the Dönmes gravitated toward living communally within the greater Ottoman society. With their charismatic personalities and knowledge of mysticism, Nathan of Gaza and Abraham Cardozo stood at the apex of the Jewish Sabbateans. Both were in communication with the Dönmes throughout their lives, in such a way that they helped the Dönmes to overcome the paradoxes of the necessity of the messiah's conversion, of his antinomian actions, of his death, and of his second coming.

Nathan of Gaza and the Lurianic Kabbala

Earlier generations of scholars of Sabbateanism, including Scholem, argued that it was mostly Lurianic Kabbala, being injected into the minds of the Sabbatean masses via Nathan, that gave birth to the Sabbatean movement. Later on, several scholars demonstrated that Sabbatai's knowledge of Lurianic Kabbala was limited. For example, Elqayam claims that Sabbatean tradition was closer to the ecstatic Kabbala of the Byzantine period rather than to the Lurianic Kabbala.¹³ Gries, analyzing the compendia of all the Kabbalistic literature from the end of the sixteenth to the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, concludes that the massive influence of Lurianic literature can be dated only to the post-Sabbatean times. He concludes that the diffusion of the more popular writings, including Lurianic material, may be the result rather than the cause of Sabbateanism.¹⁴ Likewise, Idel claims that Sabbatai was not aware of Lurianism, since it was not widely known until the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁵ According to Idel, the late thirteenth-century Kabbala from the circle of Joseph Ashkenazi must have contributed to Sabbatai's self-awareness as the messiah much more than anything else. He further suggests that astrological concepts serving as a conduit for messianic perceptions relating to Saturn ("Sabbatai" or "Shavtai" in Hebrew), allegedly full of acute messianic overtones, were much more important than Lurianic concepts in preparing the

¹³ Elqayam, "Sabbatai Sevi's Holy Zohar."

¹⁴ Ze'ev Gries, "The Fashioning of Hanhagot (Regimen Vitae) Literature at the End of the Sixteenth Century and during the Seventeenth Century" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 56 (1987): 561–563.

¹⁵ Idel, "One from a Town and Two from a Family."

ground for Sabbatean ideas.¹⁶ Idel also thinks that contrary to Scholem's view that mysticism and messianism are incompatible religious tendencies, they are in fact closely related spiritual phenomena. Messianism, including Sabbatianism, regularly emerges from mystical experiences. He differentiates three types of messianism—*theosophical-theurgical*, *ecstatic*, and *talismanic*—and claims that Kabbala, from the very beginning, was messianically oriented.¹⁷ Although Wolfson believes that Lurianic Kabbala was nevertheless important in disseminating the Sabbatean movement, he also demonstrates that Sabbatai and his inner circle had deep knowledge and awareness of astrology and of the meaning of “Saturn” within the Jewish mystical and messianic framework. Buttressing Wolfson’s point, a contemporary Dönme tombstone reflects their continuing interest into astrology and centrality of the Saturn in their mental cosmologies (Figure 4.1). To Wolfson, the influence of astrological ideas, both Kabbalistic and more general, centers around the planet/name *Sabbatai*, which symbolized both melancholy and genius.¹⁸ Convincing that too much emphasis was being placed on Lurianic Kabbala, Goldish shifts the focus of the Sabbatean movement from the theology of Lurianism to the widespread seventeenth-century belief in latter-day prophecy,¹⁹ an approach that I find closer to historical reality as I discuss elsewhere.²⁰

I am of the opinion that although Nathan’s Lurianism-inspired propaganda letters to other Jewish communities made an impact on the dissemination of Sabbateanism, Lurianism was not the major reason behind the rapid dissemination of the movement. As explained earlier, apart from their brief encounter in Palestine, Nathan did not spend much time with Sabbatai; therefore, he could not have had a huge impact on him. But thanks to Nathan’s continuing activities among the Dönmes, Lurianism became part of the Dönme theology after the conversion—but more important, the death—of Sabbatai. Therefore, Nathan’s role in the formation of the Dönme theology is more crucial than his role in the dissemination of the Sabbatean movement. One of the main channels through which Nathan’s ideas infiltrated the Dönme theology was Nathan’s student, Joseph Philosophos, who served as the first leader of the Dönme community.

Nathan differed from Sabbatai in explaining the mystery of the Godhead, conversion, and redemption. As discussed earlier, on several occasions Sabbatai strongly admonished him for “betraying a great and awesome ban,” namely, revealing the Mystery of the Godhead to others.²¹ In one of the letters, copied by Nathan, dated October 1669, Sevi ordered Nathan and his friend

¹⁶ Idel, “Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi.”

¹⁷ Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 27–28, 183–211.

¹⁸ Wolfson, “The Engenderment of Messianic Politics.”

¹⁹ Goldish, *Sabbatean Prophets*, chapt. 3.

²⁰ Sisman, “Global Crisis, Puritanism and Prophecy.”

²¹ Liebes, “Sabbatai Sevi’s Religious Faith,” 111.

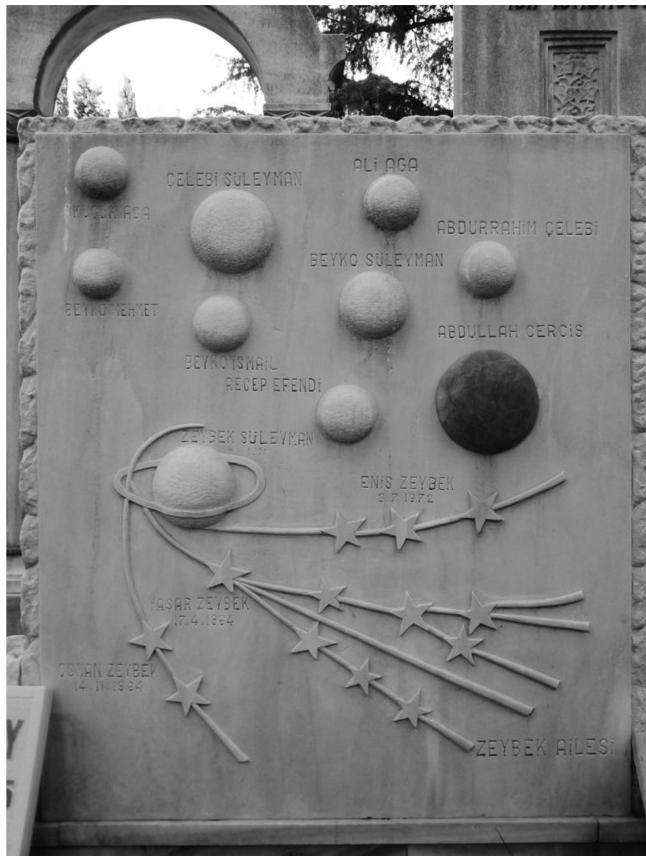


FIGURE 4.1 Tombstone: Saturn and other planets and stars, representing Sabbatai Sevi and his followers. Bülbülderesi Cemetery, Istanbul. Photo courtesy of the author.

Samuel Gandoor to come to see him. Once they arrived, Sabbatai accused Nathan of being the cause of his “desecration” and of not having correctly understood the Mystery of the Godhead. On another occasion, he wrote that Nathan had trespassed on his ban and had done evil to himself and injury to Sabbatai’s soul.²²

Nathan composed most of his writings before he was exposed to the “mystery” and admitted to the inner Sabbatean circles in Edirne and Salonica in the early 1670s. In his writings, unlike Sabbatai, who almost never mentioned the word *qelippa* (evil shell), Nathan, by using Lurianic scheme, understood the conversion as a “holy ruse” by which the messiah had entered the “gentile” world, not to save it but to hasten its utter destruction. Through this act, the messiah was to rescue the final and the biggest *qelippa*, and to bring about the

²² Amarillo, “Sabbatean Documents,” 268.

redemption. Therefore, it was unnecessary for the regular believer to convert, since the messiah had already performed the duty on behalf of all other believers. Nathan found an allusion to Sevi's wearing of the turban in the *Tiqqunei Zohar*, which depicted the messiah, as “good on the inside, [though] his outer garment was evil.”²³ He likened him to Moses, who had first lived in the house of the pharaoh, and from where he was going to convert the sultan and put the crown on his own head before the final redemption. The messiah was going to use the sultan’s army to fight against Edom, the Christians, who were responsible for many atrocities against the children of Israel. To Nathan, the cosmic struggle between good and evil assumes, in its final stage, a more complicated and paradoxical form. That’s why the power of holiness has to descend into impurity, and good has to assume the form of evil. The redemption had already begun but was still far from complete. The Shekhina had risen from the dust, but was not yet fully restored.²⁴ Likewise, the contemporary Dönmes believe that Sabbatai brought the glad tidings of the redemption, and told his believers wait for its completion during his second coming. The fact is that most of these Lurianic ideas, which were found in later Dönme traditions—and especially in the formulation of the Eighteen Commandments—testify to the level of Nathan’s influence on the Dönme theology.

After the death of Sabbatai, Nathan preferred to remain silent and stay away from the believers for a while. Toward the end of his life he settled in Sofia, where he increasingly withdrew from public contact. Now he had to explain the paradox of the death of the messiah. He upheld the theory that Sabbatai had only “vanished” or gone into hiding in some higher sphere, and that there would be a second coming. Israel Hazzan, who served as his secretary for about three years, and a Jewish Sabbatean himself, recorded many of his teachings and transmitted them to the other believers. Most of his ideas contributed to the Dönme Kabbala that was in the making in those years. Nathan died and was buried in Skopje on January 11, 1680. His tomb was revered as that of a saint and succeeding generations of Sabbateans made pilgrimages there. He was also a respected figure among the Ottoman Jews until the twentieth century.²⁵ His tombstone was destroyed during World War II. Reminding us of the philosophy of the *burden of silence* once again, his tombstone read: “The Holy Lamp—I have not expounded on his praises, for unto him *silence is praise* [italics mine] . . . the punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished.”²⁶

²³ Nathan’s letter to Samuel Primo, cited in Amarillo, “Sabbatean Documents.”

²⁴ Rena Molho and Rivka Shatz, “A Sabbatean Commentary on *Lekh-Lekha*” [Hebrew], *Sefunot* (1963): 478.

²⁵ Jacob Barnai, “From Sabbateanism to Modernization: Ottoman Jewry on the Eve of the Ottoman Reforms and the Haskala,” in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries*, ed. Harvey Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 73–80.

²⁶ Gershon Scholem, “Nathan,” *Judaica*, online edition.

Miguel Cardozo and the Theology of “Second Coming”

Similar to Nathan, Abraham Miguel Cardozo believed in the necessity of the messiah’s conversion as part of the divine plan, but unlike Nathan, he expressed his disgust with the continuous conversion of the believers. He was born into a Marrano family in 1627 and left there with his older brother, Fernando, in 1648, eventually settling in Venice and reconvertng to Judaism. Fernando took the name of Isaac, while Miguel took the name of Abraham.²⁷ Once he had heard about him, Abraham became a staunch believer in and supporter of Sevi. He justified Sevi’s “apostasy,” almost akin to Jesus’s crucifixion, as a “messianic self-sacrifice,” since its purpose was to spare the Jews by an act of vicarious atonement.²⁸

Although he never met Sabbatai, Cardozo wrote extensively in defense of his mission and contributed to the development of the theology of the second coming. He was excommunicated by the Jewish authorities and expelled from Tunisia in 1674 and moved to Livorno in Italy. He then came to the Ottoman Empire and lived there until his death in 1706, moving from one place to another. He first came to Izmir in 1675, then moved to Istanbul in 1680, to Dardanelles in 1682, to Istanbul again in 1686, to Rodoscuk (Tekirdağ) in 1696, to Edirne in 1697, and finally to Rodoscuk and Izmir in the same year. In the meantime he was always in communication with the Dönmes and Jewish Sabbateans. In December 1681, Sevi’s widow, Ayşe, proposed marriage to Cardozo, but the marriage was not realized. Wherever he went, however, he met rabbinical resistance. For example, he was expelled from Edirne in 1697 at the instigation of Samuel Primo and returned to Rodoscuk.²⁹ Ironically, Samuel Primo, who became the chief rabbi of Edirne by then, was a secret Sabbatean, but he opposed any outward Sabbatean activity in the city. Heyman, a pastor to the Dutch merchants in Izmir, writes to his friend Gisbert Cuper that he met Cardozo in Cairo in 1706; Cardozo was about a hundred years old at the time and had two wives. In the same year, Cardozo was stabbed to death by his nephew in Izmir.³⁰

Competing with Nathan and his circle, Cardozo claimed that there was no difference between his understanding and Sabbatai’s with regard to the mystery of the Godhead. In order to buttress his claims, he argued that one of his treatises, “The Greatest of Secrets” (*Raza de-Razin*), was originally written by Sabbatai himself. As Liebes shows, however, the real author of this text was nobody but Cardozo, who wrote it as a rebuttal to Samuel Primo.³¹

²⁷ For Isaac, see Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*; and for Abraham, see Cardozo, *Selected Writings*.

²⁸ Cardozo, *Selected Writings*, 87–88.

²⁹ Halperin’s introduction to Cardozo’s *Selected Writings*, xxxi.

³⁰ Gisbert Cuper, *Letters de Critique* (Amsterdam: Chez Francois L’Honoré, 1705), 396–399.

³¹ Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, 97.

In his works, Cardozo envisioned the Godhead in such a way that between Ein-Sof, on the one hand, and the sphere of the Sefirot on the other, there is the “soul of all that liveth.” Cardozo also blatantly stated that Sabbatai himself rejected Lurianic Kabbala. These ideas are radically different from Nathan’s doctrine, which puts the Sefirot and Lurianic ideas at the center. In many ways resembling the Christian Trinity, Cardozo believed that He (Holy King, God of Israel), the Shekhina, and the Holy Ancient One were all one. The “Soul of All that Lives” unifies these three “holies.”³² To him, the true Godhead is not the En-Sof, but the Keter Elyon, the first being simply a passive power that has no connection with the world.

Cardozo’s ideas shortly became very influential among the Sabbateans. Some of his ideas about the second coming and the Keter Elyon can be detected in the later Dönme tradition. For example, some contemporary Dönmes still assemble a religious quorum, *minyan*, once a year and perform a Keter Prayer, indicating that the Keter was the highest “being” in the Sabbatean cosmology. These interpretations of the cosmic realms, however, are different from what Sabbatai refers to as the “mystery.” Whether these differences played a role in the splitting of the community is another curious question still awaiting an answer. Did one Dönme subsects favor Nathanean interpretation and the other one Cardocean interpretations? We do not know.

The Rekindling of Messianic Expectations

There were many more Jewish Sabbateans who contributed to the Dönme life in the first generation. For example, Jacob Najara, grandson of the famous poet Israel Najara, was one who had been living among the Dönme. When Sabbatai was in Gaza in 1665, he stayed with Najara, whom he appointed “High Priest,” although Najara was not one of the Cohens who were the people believed to be linked to the holy bloodline of biblical Aaron. Najara visited Sabbatai in Edirne in 1671 and left us a very important account about the inner life of the messiah and his believers in Edirne. His grandfather’s songs were chanted by the Dönmes for centuries.³³ Israel Hazzan was another Jewish Sabbatean whose commentary provides us with information about the life and thoughts of the believers after the death of the messiah. As Scholem states, Hazzan was spared the “test” of conversion, as he calls it, but he nevertheless speaks with the highest respect about those of whom conversion was demanded and who submitted thereto.³⁴ Baruch Arezzo was another influential believer who always maintained ties with the Sabbateans within the empire. Being a member of Abraham Ravigo’s group, in 1682–1685, Arezzo

³² Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 901–903.

³³ Edwin Seroussi, “Iggale Kevod Malkhutekha: A Piyyut by Israel Najara Sung by the Sabbateans, and Its Melodies” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* (1993): 361–379.

³⁴ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect of the Dönme in Turkey,” in *Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 148.

composed a hagiography of Sabbatai, *Zikhron le-Veit Yisrael*, the oldest surviving biography of this kind.³⁵

While the Salonican community was still in the making and preoccupied with its own affairs, the Sabbatean movement outside of Salonica was undergoing many changes. As Mayers relates, at the beginning of the eighteenth century the Sabbateans had significantly increased their numbers and influence, so much so that the rabbis of the east and of various principal cities in Europe often acted to anathematize them.³⁶ The most notorious anti-Sabbatean influential rabbis in Europe in those times were Jacob Sasportas, Naphtali Cohen, Moses Hagiz, and Jacob Emden.³⁷

In the last years of the seventeenth century, about 120 Sabbatean missionaries from Poland, with Rabbi Judah Hassid (d.1700) at their head, traveled to Bohemia, Moravia, and the whole of Germany and Holland, preaching repentance in the name of Sabbatai.³⁸ Hassid, together with Hayim Malakh, continued on to Jerusalem, where they settled in expectation of the second coming of the messiah. Rabbi Hassid was a Sabbatean preacher, born in Dubno in Volhynia (present-day Ukraine). He was a mystic preacher, Maggid, who became active in preparing the people for the second appearance of Sevi in 1706. In 1697, a “holy community” consisting of thirty-one families decided to emigrate together to Jerusalem and there await the revelation of the messiah. Early in 1699, Judah’s community left Poland for Moravia and stopped for a period in Nikolsburg (present-day Mikoluv), where there were many Jewish Sabbatean believers. It is reported that the number of emigrants traveling from Germany and Moravia via Turkey or Italy reached 1,300, of whom approximately 500 died en route. When people from Hassid’s circle came to Turkey, Cardozo warned his disciples that they were not to get involved with the newcomers. Hassid arrived in Jerusalem on October 14, 1700, but died suddenly a few days later. Although this “failed prophecy” disheartened his followers, they still settled in the city. But Ottoman Jerusalem was not an easy place to live, due to political or economic hardships before the twentieth century. The anti-Sabbatean camp finally had Hayim Malakh and his Sabbatean group expelled from the city. The collapse of this mission threw the entire group into crisis. Several of them converted to Islam while others returned and joined various Jewish Sabbatean groups in Poland and Germany.³⁹

Just a few years later, messianic fervor broke out in Izmir. This time, Daniel Israel Bonafoux (1645–1710?) proclaimed that the coming of the messiah was near. Bonafoux was born in Salonica and later settled in Izmir and served

³⁵ Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), 275.

³⁶ M. Mayers, *A Brief Account of the Zoharite Jews* (Cambridge: Printed by W. Metcalfe, 1826), 16–18.

³⁷ For an example of rabbinic persecution of the Sabbateans in Europe, see Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moshe Hagis and the Sabbatian Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

³⁸ Mayers, *A Brief Account*, 17.

³⁹ Scholem, “Judah Hassid ha-Levi,” in *Judaica*, online edition.

there as a *hazzan* in the Pinto Synagogue. He was a follower of Sabbatai and continued to be a leading believer in him until his death. In the 1680s, he went to live in Salonica for a few years, mixing with the Sabbatean believers, *maaminim*. Because of his actions, his opponents claimed that he had converted to Islam and joined the Dönmes there.⁴⁰ When Bonafoux returned to Izmir around 1695, a few years after the division of the Dönme community in Salonica, he caused a messianic stir with his visionary activities that spread not only within the empire but also as far as Europe.⁴¹ In the meantime, Izmir was destroyed by a major earthquake in 1688 that slowed down the city's economic and population growth tremendously. During the eighteen century, the Jewish community experienced communal and economic fluctuations. Jews continued to occupy important positions in custom houses and trade networks, and worked as translators and local agents for European merchants, banking houses, and consulates. Frequent fires, epidemics, and powerful earthquakes weakened the city, and the Jewish communities, in the second half of the century, and thousands of poor Jews began to live in Jewish communal houses, *cortejos* (*yahudihane*).

Bonafoux was a disciple of Cardozo, who was active in and around the Aegean, including Candia, Chios, and Alexandria [Egypt]. When Cardozo left Izmir, he left behind a tightly organized and intensely loyal circle of disciples numbering at least two dozen, with whom he would stay in touch by correspondence for the next twenty years. The group was led by two men, both of whom appear to have been in their thirties.⁴² It is also important to remember that a handful of *maaminim*, including the group that had broken off from the Yakubis, were also living in Izmir at the time. Both Bonafoux and this group believed that rather than having a new messiah, it was necessary to believe in the second coming of the one who had already appeared.

In a series of letters written in the early 1700s by the Dutch consul in Izmir, Baron of Hochepied, and Johannes Heyman, a pastor to the Dutch merchants in Izmir, Bonafoux's "oracles" are described in detail. The letters were addressed to Gisbert Cuper, who was a missionary himself and also interested in European millenarians, including the French Huguenots. Cuper quoted Hochepied's letter extensively in his own letter to Basnage, who was revising his influential book on the history of the Jews.⁴³ According to these accounts,

⁴⁰ Scholem, "Daniel ben Israel Bonafoux" in *Judaica*, online edition.

⁴¹ For the excitement he created among the European millenarians, see Richard H. Popkin, "The Sabbatian Movement in Turkey (1703–1708) and Reverberations in Northern Europe," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94: 2 (2004): 300–317.

⁴² See Cardozo, *Selected Writings*, 72; and Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 272. Next to Bonafoux, the other was young Elijah ha-Kohen Ittamari (d.1727), who became one of the most prolific writers and moral preachers of the next two generations.

⁴³ De Beauval J. Basnage, *Histoire Juives depuis Jesus Christ jusqu'au Present* (Rotterdam: Chez Henri Scheurlee, 1716.) The first version, which was published in 1706, did not contain any reference to the Sabbatean movement, whereas the revised version in 1716 had a considerable amount of information about it, thanks to the mentioned letters.

Bonafoix had been disseminating the news that the “Messiah is by no means dead, and that he keeps himself hidden in some place, from which he will return after forty-five years of retirement (conversion or death).”⁴⁴ His claims were endorsed by Cardozo and a small group of believers. In describing the mood of anticipation then prevailing in the city, Hochepied relates that Cardozo had openly declared that Bonafoix “was not a magician, but a man that the Holy Spirit leads, and by which it works miracles. His followers believe that Sabbatai was still alive, and he must be return soon. Many even celebrate the day of his birth, which is the 26[th of] Kislev, or December 18. They then give great marks of joy, drink several glasses full, shouting “Long live the Sultan Zevi.”⁴⁵

Bonafoix’s activities were seen as a transgression of the religious and social boundaries of the Jewish communities and of the Ottoman authorities, and not surprisingly, he “was expelled by the kadi of Smyrna,” from the city in 1703.⁴⁶ He “withdrew to a small City, named Cassaba, situated in the valley of Mangnesie, on the river of Hermus, toward the frontier of Dourgoutley (present-day Turgutlu).” In a letter dated 1707, Cuper informs Basnage that some years had passed since the appearance of the messiah, but he recently learned that “the comedy had finished.”⁴⁷ After 1707, he went to Egypt and returned to Izmir in 1710 with an imaginary letter from the Lost Ten Tribes in praise of Sabbatai, who would reveal himself anew.⁴⁸

It is possible that Bonafoix’s followers, like many other Sabbateans, underwent a nominal conversion to Islam and remained together in a secluded town close to Izmir. Could this town be the same one visited by MacFarlane in 1828? During the latter’s journey from Izmir to Istanbul, MacFarlane heard a rumor about a crypto-Jewish group living in a secluded village near Bergama,

⁴⁴ Writing in 1784, Carsten Niebuhr relates that the Dönme community was calculating the coming of the messiah in 125 years. See his “Von Verschieden Nationen und Religionparthien im Turkischen Reiche,” *Deutsches Museum* (Julius 1784): 18.

⁴⁵ Cited in Cuper, *Letters de Critique*, 396–399. This part is extracted from a letter to Cuper by the Baron of Hochepied, Consul to Izmir, January 6, 1703. For Bonafoix, see also Peter Beer, *Religiösen Sekten der Juden* (Brünn: Traßler, 1823), 295–296; Meir Benayahu, “The Sabbatean Movement in Greece,” *Sefunot* (1971–1977), 197.

⁴⁶ Cuper, *Letters de Critique*, 396–398. Citing Cuper, Hasluck relates that Daniel Israel was expelled by the *kadi* from Izmir in 1703. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultan*, II: 474.

⁴⁷ Cited in Cuper, *Letters de Critique*, 396–399. Cuper, in his letter to Basnage, inserted excerpts from a letter to him by Baron of Hochepied, January 6, 1707. The text indicates that the letter is from 1717. All later sources, who mentioned Cuper, used the same date. I think the date should be 1707, rather than 1717. It seems it is a typographical mistake, since the letter could not have been written in 1717. First, the letters in the Cuper corpus are already put in chronological order, and though this particular letter has no date on it, both letters before and after this one are dated 1707. And a letter from 1707 could not contain the date of 1717. Second, the letter mentions the death of Abraham Cardozo as if it had just happened, but, as mentioned in the text, he is known to have been stabbed to death by his nephew in 1706. Third, Basnage published his revised corpus in 1716. According to Basnage, the letter was written by Heyman to Cuper of Smyrna on January 29, 1707. See Basnage, *Histoire Juives*, XIV: 793.

⁴⁸ The letter is found in a manuscript, housed in the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, no. 2263.

a region next to the Turgutlu Valley. He was of the opinion that the community dated from the time when they were forcibly converted to Islam during the late eleventh-century Turkish conquest. However, Islamization of Anatolia happened in a much later period. There is no historical evidence that the Turks forced the Jews to convert to Islam in Anatolia in earlier periods.⁴⁹ Hasluck argues that this secret community was an offshoot of the “Turco-Jewish (Dunme)” community of Izmir.⁵⁰ If all of these assumptions are true, then we face a very interesting phenomenon. In addition to the three known Sabbatean subsects, there might have been a fourth one, which could tentatively be called the Bergama community (or Bergamalilar in Turkish). Unfortunately, the fate of this community is unknown for the time being. The existence of the Bergama community also shows once again that Sabbatean believers, whether part of one of the larger, well-known groups or not, lived not only in Salonica but also in other parts of the empire.

Other famous Jewish Sabbateans, such as Abraham Yakhini, Samuel Primo, Meir Rofe, Shilo Sabbatai of Tartaria, Mordahai Eisendstad of Poland, Mordecai Ashkenazi of Italy, Daniel Levi de Barrios of Amsterdam, Joseph ibn Sur of Morocco, Nehemiah Hayyun, and Jonathan Eybeschutz of Altona were not only active in building a posthumous messianic ideology but also very involved in the messianic upheavals in different parts of the Jewish world in and around the empire, as well as in Europe and the Mediterranean.⁵¹

It is not difficult to imagine that the Dönmes were aware of some of these activities around them. In those days, Dönme community was still in its formative stage, and their identity was in the process of negotiating among Jewish, Ottoman, and Sabbatean principles. The founders of the community were not as well versed in Islam as Sabbatai, and as a result they were unable to derive and incorporate much theological or mystical knowledge from Islam.

A Growing Community: Individual Conversions versus Mass Conversions

As suggested by Yalman and Scholem, the number of converts was about 200 families by the time Sabbatai died.⁵² With the disillusionment of the messiah's death, a few of these returned to Judaism. Reconversions was limited to individuals since a mass reconversion would have been impossible within the

⁴⁹ Charles MacFarlane, *Constantinople in 1828: A Residence of Sixteen Months in the Turkish Capital and Provinces* (London: Saunders, 1829), 170–171.

⁵⁰ Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, II: 473–474. Hasluck also states that they were probably attracted to the Bergama district by its prosperity under the rule of the Karaosmanoğlu family during the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century this family has been rumored to be of Dönme origin.

⁵¹ For more examples, see Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*, chap. 6.

⁵² Yalman, “Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfasi,” and Scholem, “Crypto-Jews,” 149.

legal framework of the Ottoman Empire, as apostasy in Islam could be punished by death. On the contrary, new conversion cases made the community grow. The nature and extent of posthumous conversions, however, have been a matter of debate among scholars. In explaining the formation of the Dönme community in Salonica, most scholars tend to accept the mass conversion of Sabbateans to Islam in the 1680s as the basis. Ben Zwi, Scholem, and many other scholars believed that mass conversion was due to the efforts of a few leading rabbis, who toured Jewish communities, campaigning energetically for the mass conversion of Jews to Islam. As a result, 200–300 families, under the leadership of Solomon Florentin, Joseph Philosophos, and his son, Yakub Çelebi, underwent a mass conversion to Islam, a unique event in Jewish history. Never before had such a considerable number of Jews embraced another faith without compulsion.⁵³ As all the conversion cases were registered in the Ottoman court records, these too must have been recorded in the official documents. It is unfortunate, however, that we do not have the Salonican court records from the 1680s, which might have testified to this mass conversion.⁵⁴

A large portion of our knowledge about the mass conversion comes from Cardozo, who mentions it repeatedly in a tone of outrage, though he never gives a clear account of what happened. Blaming Yakub Çelebi for the conversion, he referred to him as “the vile and damnable.”⁵⁵ Cardozo thinks the conversion took place because Jews were haunted by a host of lying sprits, disguised in the shape of the messiah. He tells the story of how he was visited by those spirits several times and how he ultimately defeated them. In order to protect Jews from this wicked deception, he sent warning messages to his followers including his disciples, Daniel Israel [Bonafoux] and Elijah Cohen, who were the leaders of the Izmir Sabbateans. To Cardozo, those lying spirits then headed to Salonica where they haunted the believers and compelled them to convert. Ironically, Mayers attributes the reasoning of the mass conversion to Cardozo:

A passage in the Talmud “that the messiah will not appear before all the world [all the Jews] have become either totally virtuous or iniquitous.” Cardozo argued that it would take much less time and be an easier task to make man iniquitous than virtuous; that apostasy was the most wicked and displeasing act in the sight of God, and therefore the sooner they forsook the religion of Moses the sooner Messiah’s advent would be at hand—upon this reasoning hundreds embraced Mahomedanism.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ben-Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961), 117; Scholem, “Crypto-Jews,” 275–278.

⁵⁴ The Salonican court records at our disposal range from 1696 to 1913, consisting of 330 registries (*defter*).

⁵⁵ Cardozo, *Selected Writings*, 87–88 and 285.

⁵⁶ Mayers, *Zoharites*, 16.

Even if Cardozo had ever made such an apocalyptic argument, assuming that it would accelerate the coming of the messianic age, he was utterly unhappy with the mass conversion. A contemporary of Sabbatai, Meletios, the metropolitan of Athens (1661–1714), gives an account of a Jewish mass conversion without describing its size. He relates that in 1683 a Jewish messiah, called the First Israelite Prince and esteemed as a king by all the Jews, appeared in Salonica. He held Yakub accountable for the messianic episode.

Again, another time in 1683, a Jew of Salonica preached of himself that he was the Messiah. All the Jews of Jerusalem believed in him; they wrote [about him] to the other cities in which Jews were located. In this way as well as by letters, they had declared him the “First Israelite Prince.” The Jews rejoiced at their false Messiah and revered him as a king. This noise arrived at the ears of the emperor of the Turks, who then resided in Belgrade. The emperor sent his men to stop this false messiah. Those sent by the king had found the messiah sitting in a house, surrounded by bright lights, and esteemed as a king. They arrested him and sent him to the king. This was the place where, out of fear, he accepted the Muslim religion. When he got back to Salonica, several of the notable Jews, not being able to bear this shame, themselves converted to Islam.⁵⁷

It is historically accurate that the Mehmed IV spent the summer of 1683 in Belgrade, on the eve of the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683. The sultan reached Belgrade on May 24, 1683, and remained there until the end of August. It is possible that “the Jewish messiah” was taken into his presence, but it is not clear whether there was a connection between the “forced conversion” of the messiah and the “mass conversion” of the Jews in Salonica. Based on this account, both Galante and Scholem have concluded that the involvement of the Turkish authorities led to the forced conversion of the messianic leader and later, other members of the community.⁵⁸ If Yakub Çelebi or a certain “Israeli prince” was indeed taken before the sultan, given the previous Sabbatean experience, about which the sultan and Vani were well informed, the “culprit” may have been given the same choices offered to Sabbatai. But we know that Yakub was already a Muslim, so what would be the point of forcing *him* to convert to Islam at that point? He could have been punished for the crime of “sedition,” but not forced to convert.

Moses Hagiz, who was a bitter critic of the Sabbateans in the eighteenth century, relates that 200–300 families converted to Islam on December 22, 1686.⁵⁹ Visiting Salonica in 1730s, a French missionary, Souciet, mentions the existence of “new-Muslims” in the city, who were still reciting their “former prayers” instead of Islamic prayers. Those “pretended converts” were the

⁵⁷ Cited in Galante, *Nouveaux Documents sur Sabbetaï Sevi*, 110.

⁵⁸ Scholem, “Crypto-Jews,” 150.

⁵⁹ Moses Hagiz, *Shever Poskim* (London: n.p., 1719), 39. Cited in S. K “Dönmeh,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Berlin: Eschkol, 1928–1934), 1190.

Sabbatean “rebels” who had been waiting for the second coming of the messiah in Salonica “sixty years ago,” after which they were forced to convert to Islam.”⁶⁰ If we consider that Souciet published this entry in 1738, then “sixty years ago” would refer to the year 1678. Since he refers specifically to the city of Salonica, he is most likely referring to an upheaval in the city after the death of the messiah. He tells that they are still waiting for the messiah but it is not clear which “messiah” they were awaiting in the 1730s. Was it Sabbatai, Yakub Çelebi, or Osman Baba, who was the leader of the Karakaş group?

Galante gives the date of the mass conversion as 1687 and identifies the name of the messiah as Yakub Çelebi. But he does not say how many people took part in the conversion.⁶¹ His view is that the Salonican rabbis, annoyed with the messianic leanings among the Jews, petitioned the Ottoman authorities to stem the messianic unrest in the city before it was too late.

A contemporary Dönme oral account presents a different version of the mass conversion story. According to this one, Jewish Sabbateans were under constant harassment and pressure from the Jewish authorities. They were not even allowed to enter the synagogues. These believers had not yet converted to Islam during Sabbatai’s life time, either because Sabbatai had not “chosen” them as followers to whom he would reveal the “mystery,” or because they did not have the courage to appear before the messiah, for he would have asked them to convert. Yakub Çelebi suggested to this group that they convert to Islam to escape the pressure they were experiencing from the Jewish community. He is reported to have said to them that he knew the “mystery” of the messiah and he could reveal it to them so they would have the courage to receive the messiah when he came. It was on this “promise” that many of the Jewish Sabbateans converted.⁶²

Although it was not a general Ottoman policy to encourage mass conversion, small-scale Christian conversions were not uncommon, especially in the Balkans throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶³ In the case of Jews, a voluntary or involuntary mass conversion on this scale would have been unprecedented. However, based on the above-mentioned accounts, it seems that a unique Jewish mass conversion did take place sometime in the 1680s. As indicated by Benayahu, one could add an economic factor to the reasons behind the mass conversion.⁶⁴ As Jewish residents of Salonica, the

⁶⁰ Jean-Baptiste Souciet, “De la ville Salonique,” in *Jesuits: Letters from Missions*, ed. Louis Aime-Martin (Paris: A. Desrez, 1838), 77–78.

⁶¹ Galante, *Nouveaux Documents sur Sabbetaï Sevi*, 110.

⁶² Related to me personally by a contemporary Dönme.

⁶³ Documentation of such mass conversions can be found in the Ottoman records. For instance, on January 24, 1676, fifty boys converted to Islam and were appointed apprentices at the royal garden. See BOA, Ibnu'l Emin, Hatt-i Hümayun no. 6. In another incident on July 7, 1677, there was a mass conversion of forty men, thirty-one women, and three children. As a partial reward for their conversion, they were given 124,570 aspers to purchase new garments (*Kisve Pahasi*). BOA, Ali Emiri, no. 8142.

⁶⁴ Benayahu, “The Sabbatean Movement in Greece,” 92–94.

Sabbateans were supposed to pay a high kosher meat tax (*gabela*) to the Jewish community as well as the poll tax, *jizya*, to the state. By converting to Islam they could avoid both and also take advantage of the extra economic privileges that Muslims had in the market.⁶⁵ Considering their difficult economic situation, these advantages would have been significant incentives for many Jewish Sabbateans.

The question is, how many of Jews converted and joined Dönme community in those years? There were already about 200 convert families by the time Sabbatai died. If we claim another conversion of 200–300 families in the 1680s, then the Dönme community must have been around 600 families by the end of the seventeenth century. But we know that the Dönme population was approximately 600 families almost a century later. With this later figure, we need to include a group of Polish Sabbateans who joined the Dönmes in the 1750s. We also know that the rate of population increase in the empire almost doubled in the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Bearing all these factors in mind, it is doubtful that the mass conversion of the 1680s was as large as originally assumed. Working with the attested figure of 600 families in 1800, and considering a century of population growth and a substantial number of Polish immigrants, a substantially more modest “mass conversion” must have occurred.

Turkish and Jewish involvement in the matter might have been a factor that further strengthened their crypto-identity and accelerated the adoption of the Eighteen Commandments. The events leading up to the conversion may help to explain why the Yakubis have been more conscientious in their outward observance of Islamic practice than other sects, and to clarify some of the reasons for growing opposition to Yakub’s authority. Ironically, the whole proselytizing effort of Yakub fits into the model of Festinger’s “failed prophecy” argument that assumed the disillusioned believers made an effort to convert more people into their cause in order to reduce their own mental dissonance.

A New Authority: Karakaş

Yakub Çelebi strengthened his authority and the perception of him as a “deity” as the community evolved, but his very authority began creating dissent among the believers. Some of the Sabbateans who remained faithful to Judaism were forced out of Salonica due to his pressure.⁶⁷ Despite the inner tension, the community stayed together until the early 1690s, when it was divided into two subsects. In the beginning, all the Sabbateans were known as

⁶⁵ I am thankful to Rifat Abou-El-Haj, who drew my attention to this important factor in our conversations.

⁶⁶ For the population growth patterns in the empire, see Cem Behar, *Osmalı İmparatorluğunun ve Türkiye'nin Nüfusu, 1500–1927* (Ankara: T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1996).

⁶⁷ Benayahu, “The Sabbatian Movement in Greece,” 96–99.

maaminim or *müminler*, but after the first split, Yakub's group became known as the Yakubis, and the rest continued to be known as *maaminim* or Izmirlis.

The resistance against Yakub's leadership was mainly because of the tight and arbitrary control he exercised over the community, his messianic claims, and his literal adoption of Islam. Among the dissenters, Mustafa Çelebi, probably the former rabbi Baruh Konio (or Cohen)⁶⁸—an early believer in and companion of Sevi—represented the strongest voice. “He was a clerk in a Jewish religious court, or a presiding judge, a competent scholar and cabalist [who] developed a new and extreme system of Sabbatean doctrine.”⁶⁹

Rather than attributing the split to a single event, it is safer to assume that it was the culmination of long-lasting tensions over the issues of leadership and authority within the group. We have several conflicting Dönme accounts describing the fateful causes of the split. According to one, for example, a divorce case was the main cause.⁷⁰ One day an old man came to Yakub Çelebi, complaining that his young and beautiful wife had been unfaithful to him with the son of an Ottoman governor. The couple was brought before the members of the administrative committee for a hearing in the Saadethane, the communal house in the Yılan Mermeri neighborhood. Although divorce was strictly forbidden, Yakub ruled that the couple should be granted a divorce. This was quite a significant event, since the community was facing a divorce case for the first time. Mustafa Çelebi was present during the trial. As he heard the verdict, he accused Yakub of transgressing Sabbatai's principles. According to him, Yakub was already lax in implementing Sabbatean principles, and the divorce verdict was a final testimony of this laxity. Yakub might also have been criticized for following Islamic principles too closely. For his part, Yakub argued that the Sabbatean principle of divorce was valid for the “pure,” not for the “impure.” The adulterous woman was, due to her actions, no longer among the “pure,” and thus his verdict was valid. This incident increased the animosity between Yakub Çelebi and Mustafa Çelebi.

Another point of contention between two groups reportedly occurred over an inheritance issue. A certain Abdullah, who was a friend of Mustafa Çelebi, passed away. The deceased's wife, a certain Rabia Hatun, was Yakub's relative. According to community rules, the widow and children were to receive an equal share of the inheritance but Yakub wanted to manage the entire inheritance on behalf of the community. Mustafa accused him of betraying another Sabbatean principle and of being a usurper of the communal leadership. Mustafa Çelebi's arguments were backed by Abdullah, Mehmed Çelebi, and Gaffar Agha. A certain Ismail Çelebi, who was one of the supporters of Yakub in this dispute, accused the followers of Mustafa Çelebi of sacrilege and heresy. In

⁶⁸ Later, the Karakaş sect was also called Koniosos, probably referencing the name of Baruh Konio. The direct descendants of this family assumed the surname of Koyuncu in the twentieth century and continued to play an important role in leading the sect.

⁶⁹ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 118.

⁷⁰ Cited in Oruç, “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?” May 26, 1927.

the meantime, Yakub Çelebi threatened Mustafa Çelebi and his followers with excommunication. At that moment, Mustafa Çelebi demanded that those who supported him should follow him. We are not sure how many people adhered to the new group, but Oruç claims that initially sixty-three families joined Mustafa Çelebi, and Ben-Zwi claims that forty-three families remained with the Yakubis while the rest joined Mustafa Çelebi.⁷¹ According to Yalman, this split took place in 1691.⁷²

In addition to disagreements concerning the implementation of Sabbatean principles in daily affairs, there was also a major theological difference between the followers of Yakub Çelebi and those of Mustafa Çelebi. Yakub was not only a profane communal leader but also a spiritual leader, thus wielding power and authority in both spheres. Mustafa Çelebi was a learned man, but he was not equipped with either the popular authority or charisma to challenge Yakub's spiritual authority. Mustafa Çelebi produced a further argument. He and his followers claimed that Sabbatai's soul transmigrated into the person of Baruhia Russo, or Osman, the baby born soon after the death of the messiah. It was not Yakub but Osman who was the real heir to the messianic authority. Therefore, in addition to his previous efforts, with this move and Mustafa Çelebi played the most important role in the establishment of the new subsect.

Osman was born to the family of Abdurrahman Efendi (possibly Levi Shalom) and Fatima Hanım.⁷³ He was an ill-fated baby, suffering from epilepsy. According to a Karakaş tradition, sometime in 1684, Osman's mother saw the messiah in her dream. He was draped in green from head to toe, and his face and eyes were emitting rays of light in every direction. He approached them and then kissed Osman on the cheeks. She woke up in amazement and narrated the dream to her husband. In the middle of the night, Abdurrahman Efendi hastily ran to report it to Mustafa Çelebi. Mustafa Çelebi was extremely happy about the news and told Abdurrahman that it was clear that the light of the messiah would transmigrate to Osman's soul.⁷⁴ From that moment on, Osman was seen as a miracle worker and healer, and a hagiographical tradition began to emerge around his cult. When he reached the age of six or seven, according to another tradition, Osman behaved like a mature man, talking easily with elderly people. Wherever he went, he brought blessings and abundance with him. For example, he began to work in a store where half the merchandise was sold the first day he was at work.⁷⁵ According to

⁷¹ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 118.

⁷² Yalman "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfası."

⁷³ Yalman claims that Abdurrahman converted to Islam in 1683. Scholem surmises that Osman was either the son of Mustafa Çelebi or of Abdurrahman. See Gershon Scholem, "Baruhia Rosh ha-Shabbataim ba-Saloniki," in *Mahkarai Shabtaut*, ed. Yahuda Liebes (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), 321–391. Osman's son was named Abdurrahman, an indication that Osman's father was more likely Abdurrahman, for it was a custom to name sons after grandfathers.

⁷⁴ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfası."

⁷⁵ Oruç, "Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?" May 27, 1927.

another legendary account, the store owner's daughter, Rachel, was suffering from typhus and was expected to die soon. Mustafa Çelebi suggested inviting Osman to heal Rachel. Osman touched Rachel's forehead, and shortly thereafter she opened her eyes and smiled. Osman's miracles were confirmed once again through the testimony of the community elders.⁷⁶

Although these hagiographical accounts seem to be teleologically reconstructed, their circulation in later periods is yet another proof that the deep schism and different truth claims among the subsects continue until the present day. After the division, the leaders of the communities did not allow their members to intermarry or interact with non-members at any level. Perhaps, also following some of the recommendations of Cardozo, Mustafa Çelebi's group (later on Karakaş) attempted to adhere more closely to the original Sabbatean Kabballistic principles and were less willing to integrate into greater Muslim society.

In these years, following closely the spirit of the Eighteen Commandments, Yakub envisioned that his community should observe all possible public Islamic duties, including daily prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. He himself never ceased to go to mosques and perform Islamic duties. If the messiah had followed Islamic principles, there must have been wisdom behind it. Yakub even changed the dress code for his community. The women were to wear black garments tied by long ropes, yellow shoes, and different hairstyles. The men were to shave their heads. Fittingly, the group was also known as the “Arpados” (clean-shaven).⁷⁷ Through those outward changes, he was distinguishing his community from the Mustafa Çelebi group and bringing them closer to the Turkish Muslim lifestyle.

In following Islamic principles in public, Yakub outperformed even the messiah by deciding to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca. In light of pre-modern social, technological, and sanitary conditions, this was of all religious duties for Muslims the most expensive and perilous, since traveling to Mecca and Medina could have taken several months. This was exactly the reason the Ottoman sultans never made the pilgrimage. On the way to Mecca, the pilgrims would visit Jerusalem, since it was considered the most important religious site after Mecca and Medina.

The Dönme tradition gives a full account of Yakub's journey and events thereafter.⁷⁸ In order to win the Salonican Muslims' hearts and to dispel any suspicion among the new converts, Yakub's entourage set sail from Salonica to Mecca via Jaffa (or Alexandria) in the mid-1690s. He left his brother-in-law Hüseyin Çelebi as his deputy and took Mustafa Efendi with him on his journey. On the way to Mecca, however, he died. The exact location and time of his death are unclear. Yalman thinks that he died on the return trip.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Oruç, “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?” May 27, 1927.

⁷⁷ Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 116–117.

⁷⁸ Oruç, “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?” May 30–31, 1927.

⁷⁹ Yalman, “Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfası.”

Tobias Cohen⁸⁰ and Peter Beer⁸¹ think that he died in Alexandria on the way to Mecca in January 1695. Legend has it that Yakub's camel grew irritated for some reason and attacked its owner. Crushed beneath the camel, he died immediately.

A month later, Mustafa Efendi returned to Salonica, where members of the community had already received the tragic news. Mustafa Efendi, now called Hadji Mustafa, brought them some earthshaking news. Holding in his hand what he alleged were orders from Yakub, Mustafa gathered the community and explained that while they were on their way to Medina, he and Yakub had stopped to visit Mt. Sinai. Yakub went up to the mountaintop alone and stayed there for seven nights, following the example of Moses. Mustafa waited for Yakub to come down. When he did and Mustafa saw him, there were rays of light emanating from his eyes. Yakub told Mustafa that he needed to leave him and asked Mustafa to return to the community to explain to his followers that [Mustafa] would be the caliph until Yakub's return. Some believers doubted the veracity of those "unity" messages, but the alternative to accepting his authority might have meant the possible disintegration of the fledgling community. Trying to avoid this consequence, Salim Çelebi, one of the elders of the community, approached Mustafa and kissed his hands, a sign meant to confirm Mustafa's leadership of the community. Once his leadership was confirmed, Mustafa, like Yakub Çelebi, worked hard to strengthen the communal structure. He developed new rules and regulations that ultimately led to a more extensive institutionalization of the Yakubis and their further integration into the larger Muslim society. Oruç's description of the early days seems to be closer to the reality:

Hadji Mustafa first strengthened the administrative committee. The *Reis*, i.e. the *Halife*, had several advisors, including two female aides. The consultants were busy with the social affairs of the community. . . . Women took care of other sick women, and arranged marriages and funerals. Their salaries were paid by the Community Chest (*Cemaat Sandığı*). His new rulings did not conflict with the principles of Yakub Çelebi and Aziz Mehmed Efendi, but instead strengthened them. He paid special attention to the matter of clothing, which distinguished them from the other sect: A Yakubi man had to shave his head. A Yakubi woman had to comb her hair like a Turkish women. Begging was strictly forbidden. The community was to find a job for a beggar or send him money. This created solidarity among the members of the community. . . . He did not allow the women to get the equal share in inheritance. . . . The circumcision ceremony was to be reported to the *Reis*. Funerals were to be held under his guidance. . . . The rich were to pay alms. But the charity was to be given to the needy of the community only. . . . Meanwhile, everyone was supposed to observe Islamic principles. No one was allowed to skip even a daily prayer. . . . Once one of the Yakubis wanted to marry

⁸⁰ Cohen, "Ma'aresh Tobiah," 27; Ben-Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 118.

⁸¹ Beer, *Religiösen Sekten der Juden*, 294.

his daughter to a *maamin* [i.e., a member of Mustafa Çelebi's group], but Mustafa Efendi did not allow the marriage, and excommunicated the father. . . . Some of them attained high positions and sheikhdom in the Salonian Sufi orders.⁸²

As Yalman, who was himself a Yakubi, asserts, after him the community was ruled by Dervish Mehmed Agha and Ishak Agha, who were called Zişan. After Ishak Agha, fifteen more *reis*, also called *devletlu*, came to rule the community until the first quarter of the twentieth century.⁸³

A New Authenticity: *Kapancıs*

According to a rabbi from Istanbul in 1714, the Dönme community was very active and effective in Salonica.⁸⁴ The Yakubis had settled major issues, but the *maaminim*, Mustafa Çelebi's group, were still in turmoil with regard to the question of leadership and the establishment of new principles. Mustafa Çelebi and Osman Baba (Baruhia Russo) were the community leaders and appropriated the theology of the second coming, which was formulated by Nathan and Cardozo. Several community members also believed that Osman Baba (also known as Osman Agha and Osman Bevvap (literally means door)) possessed messianic qualities and that he was no other than the reincarnation of Sabbatai. But no one had yet dared to declare that he was the messiah who would complete Sabbatai's mission. When the second coming of the messiah still did not occur, Mustafa Çelebi proclaimed that Osman would assume the role of the messiah in 1716, on his fortieth birthday.⁸⁵ The age forty is symbolically important both in Judaism and Islam. Sabbatai declared his messiahship at the age of forty and the prophet Muhammed also started his mission at that age. In both Sufi and Kabbalistic traditions, this is the age of "maturity," after which a disciple is allowed to study secret subjects. The proclamation of Osman as the (future) messiah created further excitement in the Dönme community. This was also the time when Judah Hassid and Daniel Israel Bonafoux stirred new messianic expectations in the empire. Although it is plausible to think that they were cognizant of each other's activities, we do not have any evidence at our disposal to prove it. Later, Osman Baba was deified in the eyes of his believers in such a way that he was seen as the reflection of God of Israel who dwelled in Tiferet, while Sabbatai was seen as the reflection of Shekhina.

Osman Baba's opponents declared him a dull-witted epileptic who had simply been used as a tool by other Dönmes. Ben Zwi too claims that Osman was indeed an ignorant and an epileptic man.⁸⁶ Yalman describes him as a

⁸² Oruç, "Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?" May 30, 1927.

⁸³ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfası."

⁸⁴ Cited in Emden, *Torath ha-Qena'oth*, 61.

⁸⁵ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfası."

⁸⁶ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 118.

coarse man who was tall, dark, and fat with blue eyes.⁸⁷ Osman Baba's sect was reprovingly called On Yollarlar (men of the ten tricks or ten paths), based on their radical antinomianism, especially the sexual aspects. By that, as Scholem asserts, the opponents meant that group members were regarded as syncretists who wanted to bring together the paths of various religions.⁸⁸ If this was the case, then, ironically, they seem to have internalized Sabbatai's "mystery," which assumed that other religions contained parts of the Truth. To his adherents, Osman was "a very learned man of rare beauty."⁸⁹ He was worshipped by some of his followers as a divine being, Signor Santo, Holy Lord. Soon afterward, the news about the new messiah reached other Sabbatean communities. Emissaries were sent to Poland, Germany, and Austria to transmit the glad tidings of the new messiah. Several treatises were written detailing the theology of the new movement. Some of these treatises were compiled in a corpus that would subsequently be ascribed to Osman Baba himself. This corpus, called *Akademya*, which contains kabalistic writings and communal regulations, has been utilized by the sect members to the present. A few decades afterward, Jacob Frank came to study the teaching of Osman Baba and disseminated his ideas further in the Sabbatean communities in Europe.

Osman Baba's radical antinomian behaviors increased the tensions within his community. His morally libertine behavior toward women in particular was considered by some *maaminim* to be a sign that he was not, after all, the expected messiah. Another group of dissenters, headed by a certain Papu Ibrahim Efendi, was not pleased that Osman Baba had assumed the role of Sabbatai himself. They thought that Sabbatai was the one and only messiah, and he would return in his own soul and body, not in someone else's. Twenty years earlier, Yakub Çelebi had made the same claim, and it was for that reason that the community had divided into two. Now the same claim was being made by Osman Baba. The *maaminim* were about to divide again.

With the help of Mustafa Çelebi, Osman Baba led the community for a few more years, but he died in the early 1720s before the dispute over his leadership was resolved.⁹⁰ The impact of his sudden death was demoralizing for those who embraced his messiahship, so much so that some refused to believe that he had actually died before the redemption. Expecting that he would awaken shortly, elders of the community did not at first share the news of his death and kept his corpse in the room where he spent his last days.

⁸⁷ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfasi."

⁸⁸ Scholem, "Crypto-Jews," 153.

⁸⁹ Scholem, "Crypto-Jews," 153.

⁹⁰ The exact date of Osman Baba's death is not certain. Galante is of the opinion that he died either in 1720 or 1726. Galante, *Nouveaux documents sur Sabbetaï Sevi*, 89. Yalman thinks that he died in 1721. Abraham Amarillo visited the Karakas cemetery with a Sabbatean friend at the beginning of the twentieth century and, based on the tombstones, he concluded that Osman Baba died on June 15, 1720, and his son Abdurrahman died in 1781. Cited in Yitzhak Ben-Zwi, "The Sabbatarians at the Present Time," *Metzudah* 7 (1954): 331–338.

Though disillusioned with yet another “failed prophecy,” Osman Baba’s followers remained loyal. Just as the first messiah, Sabbatai, had disappeared from sight, so too had Osman Baba gone into “occultation.” The death, according to the party of Ibrahim, was the final proof that Osman Baba was a human being. But beyond this, they wanted to prove definitely to the believers that Osman Baba had been a false messiah. Ibrahim is reported to have said: “if you insist that he was the messiah, let’s go and check out his grave. Should his body not decompose and rot, then I will withdraw my claims.”⁹¹ Osman Baba’s followers thought that it was a disgrace to dishonor the body of the messiah simply because of one “crazy man.” But Ibrahim was persistent in his demand. At the end he was able to convince the community to examine the grave. Since both sides were suspicious of each other’s intention, they consented to having the Yakubi referees oversee the examination. Representatives of each side, “Hasan Agha and Konio Agha [Mustafa Çelebi],”⁹² and the referees, opened the grave and found that his body had been decaying with “a terrible smell.” They took the ring off his finger and brought it to the meeting as proof that they had opened the grave. That event caused a new split in the community. With this third and final split, the three subsects began to solidify in the early 1720s. The new sect became known for its first leader: “Followers of Ibrahim Agha” (İbrahim Aghalar) and later, simply as the Kapancıs. Osman’s sect came to be known as the Karakaş sect. All these subsects assumed different names in the coming centuries (see Chapter 5). Those who remained loyal to Osman’s party developed new principles and rituals around the cult of Osman Baba. He left three sons and four daughters behind, and his place was taken by his son Abdurrahman Efendi.⁹³ The tomb of Osman Baba became a place of veneration, a site of memory (*lieu de memoire*) for the believers. According to a well-established tradition, the members of the Karakaş sect, the name subsequently given to Osman Baba’s group, keep an empty bed with a green light next to it in their house so that Osman Baba will have a place on his eventual return.

The struggle within the community did not go unnoticed by outsiders during the subsects’ formative period. Perhaps because of complaints from within the sects themselves, or because the dissension created in the community echoed in the streets, or because of suspicions about the authenticity of their conversion, the Ottoman authorities felt a need to intervene in the Dönmes’ affairs in the 1720s. Rosanes states that the governor of Salonica, “Hasan Pasha learned that these new-Muslims had been following neither

⁹¹ Oruç, “Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?” June 1, 1927.

⁹² Adolf Struck, “Die Verborgenejüdische Sekte der Dönme in Salonik,” *Globus* 81 (1902): 219–224. According to a Dönme tradition, the founder of the Kapancıs was Hasan Çelebi, not Ibrahim Çelebi, and that’s why the Karakaş sect never name their children after Hasan. It is interesting to note that the Karakaş cemeteries do not have a tombstone with the name of Hasan.

⁹³ Yalman, “Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfası.”

Judaism nor Islam. And he decided to crush them in 1722. A day before realizing his plan, according to some, he died, and according to others, was murdered⁹⁴ or suffered a “possible unnatural death.”⁹⁵ Galante gives the same details and implies that the religious Dönmes interpreted the death in a way as to further strengthen their faith and status.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Rosanes, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael*, IV: 468.

⁹⁵ S. K. “Dönmeh,” 1190.

⁹⁶ Galante, *Nouveaux Documents sur Sabbatai Sevi*, 62.

Politics of Crypto- and Hybrid Identities among the Jews, Christians, and Muslims

NOT ONLY DÖNMES BUT also several other Ottoman crypto-communities were forming in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It seems that the increase in individual and mass conversion to Islam for economic and political reasons resulted in the emergence of crypto-communities in those centuries. The multiple causes for this complicated phenomenon are still incompletely understood in Ottoman studies. However, the emergence of these groups coincides with a time when the empire was going through an intense “sunnitization” process and the designations of *askeri* (non-taxpayers) and *reaya* (taxpayers) began to be replaced by “Muslims” and *dhimmis* i.e. “Non-Muslims.” Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Ottoman officials were aware that such crypto-communities existed but were indifferent toward them, in part because any intervention could affect the lives of tens of thousands of imperial citizens, causing unrest. Not until the nineteenth century did the matters of conversion, crypto-communities, and apostasy become major domestic and international issues for the empire.

The history of the Dönmes needs to be understood against the backdrop of the proliferation of the crypto-communities. How did the Dönme communities perpetuate their enigmatic identity over these centuries? Did they modify their beliefs, practices, and institutions as they interacted with other communities? How did they differ from other crypto-communities? And how were they perceived by outsiders?

Although it is meager and fragmentary, we have some knowledge of the Dönme communities in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, and more after the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But what were their lives like between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries? In describing the general conditions of Salonica in the eighteenth century, a Salonican descent, Edgar Morin, refers to it as “the dark century” and says that “when the century of Enlightenment was dawning in Europe, Salonica had fallen into intellectual

obscurity and economic lethargy.¹ This perception is prevalent among several other scholars including Ben-Zwi:

For two hundred and fifty years the Sabbateans lived, like all Marranos, a dual life. Behind the thick Chinese wall of aloofness which they erected amidst the wholly Moslem environment of Salonica, they hid a religious life very different from that which was immediately apparent. Appearing to be devout Moslems, they cultivated underground their secret religion, their specific traditions, their literature and poetry, their customs and their strange communal rites. Something like an independent republic of Marranos came into being whose undeclared citizens conspired to guard their secrets, observe the mysteries of their faith and practice the quaint religious rituals they held [that] could only be cultivated in private and under conditions of absolute secrecy. In vain did scholars and explorers, Jews and non-Jews, endeavor to uncover their secrets and to study their “heretical” writings.²

In this chapter, after constructing a historical narrative of the Dönmes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I argue that the so-called Dark Age was a very critical period for the Dönmes as they developed their idiosyncratic theological arguments and social practices within a unique messianic self-governmental framework.

As the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth, the Sabbatean communities were refashioning their identity and history, replacing historical realities with myths and legends. This formative period in some ways resembled similar times in other crypto-communities, those of early Christians, Shiites, and Marranos; but an essential difference between the Christians and the Marranos, for example, is that Christianity grew strong enough to become a public religion after the fourth century while the Marranos never formed a full-fledged community.

In this period, another fundamental development was the further differentiation among the three Dönme subsects. Although a significant part of the original Sabbatean culture remained within each subsect, these sects chose to live in different neighborhoods, bury their dead in different cemeteries, practice different rituals, and engage in different professions.

To put the developments of the subgroups in a larger historical perspective, we must bear in mind that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed major military, economic, political, and cultural transformations in the empire. After losing a large swath of territory to the Habsburgs in 1699 and moving the palace from Edirne to Istanbul in 1703, the empire entered a period of relative calm, the so-called Tulip Age (1718–1730), referring to the lavish and extravagant lifestyle of the Ottoman elite. The empire even gained new territory from the Safavids in one of the last successful military

¹ Edgar Morin, *Vidal and His Family: From Salonica to Paris* (Portland: Sussex Academy Press, 2009), 11.

² Ben-Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 110.

campaigns in 1721. Although the period ended with the bloody Patrona Halil Rebellion, which led to the deposing of Ahmet III, the empire still had been relatively peaceful domestically and internationally. This peace gave the Dönmes a tranquil environment in which to settle into their own lifestyles in Salonica and other cities with relatively little socioeconomic disruption. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the empire began to see European and Russian encroachment on intellectual, technological, commercial, and military levels. The empire lost more territory to the Russians in 1768–1774, and to the Habsburgs and Russians in the succeeding campaigns of 1787–1791.

As Quataert notes, the central Ottoman state became visibly less important in the eighteenth century nearly everywhere.³ Instead, provincial notable (*ayan*) families became the new political, economic, and military forces in the peripheries. The force of the notables reached a point, for example, that powerful members of the Greek community, called Phanariots, ruled several regions in the Balkans and Eastern Europe with full autonomy until the war of Greek independence in the 1820s.⁴ The fact that a community of notables from different regions of the empire forced the sultan to come to terms with them in a written agreement called *sened-i ittifak* in 1808 illustrates how independent and powerful the *ayans* became in the eighteenth century.⁵ As showed by Ginio, in describing the establishment of a new sacred space—a Halveti Sufi convent, in early eighteenth century Salonica—the state played only a minor role in the lives of many people who lived far from the capital. Instead, local notables, guilds, *waqfs*, and Sufi orders became the major players in the local “civic” societies.⁶ Their relatively less visible state in the provinces allowed the crypto-communities to craft their unique socio-theological frameworks away from the Ottoman religious and political authorities.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Ottomans’ over-confidence vis-à-vis Europe began to be shaken deeply and irreversibly, perhaps for the first time. Rising Russian and European interest in the Ottoman religious minorities, along with the rise of nationalism in the world after the French Revolution, put new pressure on the empire. The Serbian (1817) and Greek (1821–1830) rebellions especially, which brought nationalism to the fore, became watershed events that greatly impacted the fate of the Ottoman ethnic and religious minorities.

Attempting to reverse the downturn in the empire’s fortunes, the ruling elite engaged in military, administrative, and educational reforms that were

³ Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 46.

⁴ For an exemplary political role of the Phanariots, see Christine Philiou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2010).

⁵ For the challenge of the notables for the Ottoman order, see Ali Yaycioglu, “Provincial Elites and the Empire in the Late Ottoman World: Conflict or Partnership?” in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Routledge Press, 2012).

⁶ Eyal Ginio, “The Shaping of a Sacred Space: The Tekke of Zuhuri Seyh Ahmet Efendi in Eighteenth-century Salonica,” *Medieval History Journal* 9: 2 (2006): 271–296.

able to progress only after the destruction of the famous Ottoman army, the Janissaries (1826), and the Tanzimat Reforms (1839–1876) (see Chapter 7). The reforms, along with the colonial interests of different European countries, turned the empire into an important economic and political player in the increasingly globalized world. Salonica and its inhabitants, including the Dönmes, were the earliest recipients of those changes, and they were also the first ones to take advantage of them. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Dönmes especially emerged as the most organized, educated, and affluent people in Salonica.

Naming Hybrid Jewish and Ottoman Communities

However paradoxical it may sound, the Dönmes were visible enough to be noticed by outsiders, at least on the surface, since the group's inception. Socio-logically, they were open secret societies. They referred to themselves by the Hebrew terms *maaminim* (believers), *haverim* (friends), and sometimes even *ba'ale-i milhama* (warriors). To these generic names were added names for each subgroup.⁷ The Jews called them *minim* (heretics), *mamzerim* (bastards, due to their reported extramarital practices), *maaminiko*, or *sazanico*, without differentiating between the subgroups. Christian observers called them Zoharites, Jewish Mohemedans, or Jewish Turks. The Ottoman officials called them Nev-Muslim (New Muslim) or *muhtedi* (the one who attained the Truth). The subgroups called each other with different names as well. For example, the Karakaş, at least in the twentieth century refer to themselves as *Bizimkiler* (our people), to Kapancı as *Komşu Ağalar* (neighboring aghas), to Yakubis as *Yakubis*, and to non-Dönmes as *Yabancılar* (strangers). On a popular level, Turks called them “*dönme*” with a lower case “d,” a term to designate all types of converts, regardless of their religious origin.⁸ Then the Turks labeled them “*Dönme*” with an upper case “D,” a connotation of secret heretical beliefs and practices. As I argue elsewhere, the term was not a later invention but one that had been indiscriminately used by Turks and then others from the early days to the present.⁹

We have several accounts of missionaries, travelers, and consuls who were able to observe and gather information about Dönme communal life from

⁷ For example, the Yakubis were also called alternately Arpados, Tarbushlis, and Hamdi Beyler. The Karakaş were called Osman Babalar, On Yollular, Honyozlar/Coniozos, and Koniososlar. The Kapancı were called Papular, Ibrahim Aghalilar, Cavalieros, and Izmirliler. Cengiz Sisman, “The History of Naming the Ottoman/Turkish Sabbateans,” in *Studies on Istanbul and Beyond*, ed. R. G. Ousterhout (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 37–53.

⁸ A seventeenth-century dictionary defines the term *dönme*: “Reversus, converses, desertor, apostate. . . . Yehudiden ve Çiftutan dönme, Juif converti.” Meninski, *Thesaurus Linguarum Orientalium*. An early nineteenth century dictionary of Kieffer defines the term as “apostat, renégat, and Jewish apostates.” J. D. Kieffer and T. X. Bianchi, *Dictionnaire Turk-Français* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1835).

⁹ Sisman, “The History of Naming the Ottoman/Turkish Sabbateans.”

different centuries. These accounts are not always highly detailed, but taken together they suggest that the community did not sink into oblivion after the formative period. The existence of these idiosyncratic communities was already known to outsiders in the early 1730s. Visiting Salonica almost a decade after the final split in the Dönme community, a French missionary, Souciet, paints the following picture:

They are commonly deceptive, held in contempt by both Christians and Turks, but they are no less committed to their religion and many superstitions, in which their Rabbis maintain them. They observe the Sabbath scrupulously and if they need fire on that day, they ask some Christians to light it for them. It happens occasionally that some become Turks through fear of death or flogging. The new Muslims, originally Jewish, are little esteemed among old Mohammedans. They still retain [and pass down] from father to son a secret inclination to Judaism, to the point of reciting their old prayers instead of those from the Koran. Sixty years ago they were convinced that the Messiah was going to finally appear. To prepare for his arrival, and receive it with dignity, they plotted together and tried to make themselves masters of the city. The Turkish commanders were warned, they arrested the leaders of the revolt, and by dint of threats they were compelled to embrace the Mohammedan religion after having been forced to confess that Jesus Christ is the Messiah: it is an admission that Mahometans always require of them before their pretended conversion.¹⁰

In this surprisingly early account, it is clear that the “new-Muslims” or “pretended converts” did not follow the patterns of regular converts in assimilating into Ottoman society. Instead, these nominal converts were forming their own secret messianic subculture. Viewing the events through a decidedly Christian prism, Souciet states that the Ottoman officials suppressed a revolt, which happened “sixty years ago,” forcing the believers to convert to Islam, by saying that “Jesus-Christ was the real messiah” and not someone else. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the interest in Sabbateanism continued among Jewish and Christian observers in Europe. For example, Leyb b. Ozer,¹¹ D’Argens,¹² Carl Anton,¹³ and Voltaire¹⁴ wrote about the early stages of the Sabbatean affair and refashioned it for the Jewish and Christian audience in Europe throughout the eighteenth century. However, none showed a great interest in or a deep understanding of the internal developments within the Ottoman Dönme communities.

¹⁰ Souciet, “De la ville Salonique,” 77–78.

¹¹ Leib ben Ozer, *Sipur Ma’asei Shabtai Tsevi: Bashraybung fun Shabtai Tsevi* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1978).

¹² Marquis D’Argens, *The Jewish Spy: Being a Philosophical, Historical and Critical Correspondence* (Dublin: Printed for Oli. Nelson, 1753), II: 321–326.

¹³ Karl Anton, *Kurze Nachricht von dem Falschen Messias Sabbathai Zebhi* (Wolfenbüttel: Meißner, 1752).

¹⁴ Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History*, IV: 266–273.

By the 1830s, if not earlier, a new term of Arabic origin, Avdeti, the one who returns to where he comes from, was added to the Ottoman vocabulary and used more often as a designation for the sect. For example, a document, dated 1834, mentions that several people from the Avdeti Çorapçı Taifesi (the convert community of stocking merchants) engaged in business in Istanbul.¹⁵ The shift from the term Dönme to Avdeti in the official documents is hard to explain, but it seems that the latter has a more neutral or even courteous connotation than the pejorative term Dönme. It is possible that the “softening” of the term occurred during the Tanzimat Period when the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims was radically reorganized. That was also the time when several crypto-religious groups surfaced and to some degree were recognized by the state. While the popular term Dönme could also be used for converts from other religions, the official term, Avdeti, was used exclusively for the Dönmes. Both Dönme and Avdeti, however, denoted that there was something different and even unacceptable about these idiosyncratic Muslims.

Most of the times the outsiders called them with so many different names, without necessarily acknowledging the essential differences among the subsects, hence feeding into the conflation issue that I mentioned in the introduction. The names of the subgroups were nearly standardized as Yakubi, Karakaş, and Kapancı only after the first half of the twentieth century, primarily after the canonical work of the Turkish Jewish scholar, Abraham Galante.¹⁶ As late as 1919, for example, the subgroups were called as Yakubis, “Kuniosis,” and Izmirlis, respectively.¹⁷

European Connections: The Karakaş and the Polish Crypto-Jewish Frankists

Among the Dönme groups, the Karakaş possessed the most antinomian and zealous missionary spirit. While the other subsects were mostly concerned with their own affairs, the Karakaş continued sending emissaries to other Sabbatean communities in Europe in the 1730s and 1740s, bearing the glad tidings of the second coming of Osman Baba, and in return they received visitors from other parts of the world. This spirit kept them connected to the outside world, including to the early Hassidic circles in Eastern Europe. It is little wonder that the legendary founder of Hassidism, Baal Shem Tov, and the Hassidic elders made constant disguised references to the Sabbatean affair in those years. Scholars who studied with Nathan or his pupils in Salonica—like Solomon Ayalon and Elijah Mojajon, who later became rabbis of important communities such as those in Amsterdam, London, and Ancona—spread the

¹⁵ BOA, HAT 18700/A Dosya # 318.

¹⁶ Abraham Galante, *Nouveaux Documents sur Sabbataï Sevi; Organisation et usages et Coutumes de ses Adeptes* (Istanbul: Fratelli Haim, 1935).

¹⁷ Anonymous, “A Strange Sect in Salonicci,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1919.

teaching of Sabbateanism.¹⁸ In the meantime Jewish Sabbateans were active in almost all of the European Jewish communities. Unfortunately, apart from the case of Jacob Frank (1726?–1791), we do not know how aware the Salonican Dönmes were of the Sabbatean debates taking place in European Jewish circles in those days.

Jacob Frank noted in his diary in the 1750s that he visited Salonica several times and maintained a spiritual and material relationship with the Dönmes, especially with the Karakaş sect, from whom he gathered the nucleus of his ideas. Frank's father was a Sabbatean believer who moved to Czernowitz, in the Carpathian region of Bukovina, in the Balkans in 1730, where the Sabbatean influence at the time was still strong. Frank spent his youth in Ottoman lands, including Czernowitz, Izmir, Istanbul, and Bucharest. As a traveling merchant in textiles and precious stones, he earned the nickname "Frank," a name generally given in the Ottoman Empire to Europeans. Growing up in Ottoman lands and later doing business there suggests that he had a capacity to communicate in Turkish. He became close to the Dönme leaders in Salonica and eventually converted to Islam, assuming the Turkish name Ahmed.¹⁹ In 1752, he married in Nikbulu (present-day Nicopolis, in Bulgaria), with two witnesses from the Karakaş group: Rabbi Mordechai and Rabbi Nahman. The bride, Hannah, was the daughter of a certain Tova, possibly Judah Levi Tova (Dervish Efendi), who would become an influential Dönme leader in the 1780s. According to a contemporary account, Hannah was from the Cohen family. Based on his family tree, Jaan Kaplinski, a Frankist descendant, claims that Hannah's father was related to the Kaplinskis (of Jewish Sabbatean origin), who were also Cohens.²⁰ However, it is hard to prove these claims conclusively. On the night of his wedding, as was the custom in the Dönme tradition, Frank was brought into the "mysteries" that were transmitted only to the select members of the group. It is believed that Frank attempted to become the new leader of the Dönmes in Salonica, but there is no sign that the Karakaş group accepted him as the new "vessel" of the messianic soul. He vied for leadership in other places as well, along with several other Sabbatean pretenders, including Wolf Eybeshutz.²¹ By the mid-eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was still in a relatively peaceful period, without major trouble at its borders. The Dönmes and Frankists were able to travel in and around Ottoman and Polish borders without much trouble.

In 1755, Frank gathered a group of local adherents in Podolia and began to preach the "revelations" that had been communicated to him by the Dönmes. In those days, Podolia was the only place where several Jews openly adhered

¹⁸ Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 274.

¹⁹ Maciejko, *Mixed Multitude*, 119.

²⁰ I am thankful to Jaan Kaplinski, a former Member of Parliament in Estonia, for sharing his family history with me.

²¹ For the competition between Frank and Wolf Eybeshutz, see Maciejko, *Mixed Multitude*, chaps. 6–8.

to Sabbateanism. Frank claimed that he was the reincarnation of Sevi and Osman Baba, and that he had come to complete Sevi's "incomplete mission." In the early years his connection with the Dönmes was so strong that he recited the Ladino prayer of "Mi dio Baruchia," and his follower recited a verse from the Dönme credo, "I believe with perfect faith in the faith of the God of truth . . . the three knots of faith which are one."²²

Within a brief period, Frank's teachings led to the emergence of a mass movement in Poland. As Maciejko demonstrates, Jewish authorities, fearing a new messianic disturbance, contacted the Christian authorities and argued that since the rites of Frank's followers involved the practice of magic and immoral conduct, both Jews and Christians should condemn these people and burn them at the stake. Frank, an Ottoman subject, was released and expelled to the Ottoman territories, but the others were found guilty of breaking numerous *halakhic* prohibitions and were subjected to the Jewish ban of excommunication. But the Jewish scheme backfired when the Frankists took the opportunity to ally themselves with the church, presenting themselves not as heretics but as anti-Talmudists. Frank convinced the church that his followers would accept baptism, but they needed time to prepare for it. He also promised to conduct a public disputation against the recognized Jewish authorities.

As a result of increasing pressure, all Frankists had left the Commonwealth of Poland for Ottoman lands by May 1758.²³ Jews from Poland, settling in the Ottoman Empire, were not unusual in those times. For example, one Ottoman document notes that more than 300 Jewish families from Poland asked to be accepted as *dhimmi* and settled in Salonica in 1748.²⁴ Polish Jews, both traditional and Frankists, who came to settle in Turkey would be referred to by the locals as Lehli (Polish) in later centuries. Many of them still have descendants among contemporary Dönmes and Jews.

With the involvement of Jewish and Christian authorities, similar to what happened in the Sabbatean movement almost a hundred years before, the Frankist movement came to an end in 1759 with the conversion of Frank, and many of his followers, to Catholicism. In justifying his conversion, Frank made several references to the necessity of entering into Da'at of Edom (Christianity) in his later years, as did the Sabbateans in explaining Sabbatai's conversion to Islam. After the mass conversion, the Frankist believers, whose members lived mainly in Warsaw, Prague, and Offenbach, practiced a crypto-Jewish life within the Catholic fold. In 1791, the estimated total number of baptized Frankists living in Warsaw was 6,000, and in the whole of Poland, 24,000.²⁵

²² Maciejko, *Mixed Multitude*, 33.

²³ Maciejko, *Mixed Multitude*, 33.

²⁴ BOA, Cevdet Hariciye # 647.

²⁵ Paweł Maciejko, "Frankism," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New York: YIVO Publishing, 2010).

Frank, who held court in Offenbach until his death in 1791, continued the tradition of Osman Baba.²⁶ The following examples show that the relationship between the Dönmes and Frankists continued even in later centuries. The first example is the case of Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), a Polish nationalist, poet, and member of a family of Frankist origin, who died in exile in Istanbul. The Young Turks,²⁷ among whom there were several Dönmes, deeply revered him and turned his home into a museum in 1909.²⁸ The other example is an anecdote related by a Dönme, who reported that the Dönmes maintained steady relations with certain seemingly Catholic families in Warsaw and Vienna.²⁹

Like the Dönmes, the Frankists were the subject of wild rumors about their antinomian behaviors. In her study on gender issues within Sabbatean and Frankist circles, Rapoport confirms antinomian sexual behaviors among these groups, claiming that the idea of living in a messianic age was expressed in their ritual transgression of sexual prohibitions.³⁰ During their trials, the Frankists seem to admit to the accusation that they committed adultery, engaged in wife swapping, studied banned Sabbatean books, and professed the faith of Sevi. Due to the nature of these records, which, like those of the Inquisition, were often extracted under duress, these accounts should be viewed with some caution. The following entry from Frank's diary, however, suggests that the Frankists indeed engaged in some antinomian sexual practices:

The Lord set up a guard in the courtyard made up of our people, so that no one might dare even to look through the window, and he himself went in with the Brothers and Sisters, undressed nude and also Her Highness, and ordered all those gathered [to do so], and after having taken a little bench he drove a nail into the center and set two burning candles on the [bench] and hung his cross from the nail, and so after having knelt before it himself he took the cross and bowed to the four sides and kissed; then Her Highness and then everyone he ordered to do so; after that, the sexual relations took place thereafter according to his ordination. At that, one of the women laughed, then at that moment the Lord ordered the candles put out, saying: If they would let the candles burn they would see what would happen.³¹

²⁶ Scholem, "The Crypto-Jewish Sect," 160.

²⁷ Reformist young Ottoman intellectuals who wanted to change the Ottoman monarchical system since the late nineteenth century.

²⁸ Adam Mickiewicz is considered to be one of the most important Slavic poets after Pushkin. During the Crimean war he escaped to Istanbul from Russian persecution with several other Polish commoners and soldiers. See Gad Nasi, "In the Footsteps of Sabbatean Redemption: From Mickiewicz to Young Turks," *HALAPID* 16: 4 (Fall 2009): 28–38. For other Polish refugees and converts, see Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 173–81.

²⁹ Scholem, "The Crypto-Jewish Sect," 163.

³⁰ Rapoport, *Women and the Messianic Heresy*, 175–236.

³¹ Jacob Frank, *The Chronicle and the Collections of the Lord*, ed., trans., and annotated Harris Lenowitz, unpublished work, cdix. I am grateful to Harris for allowing me to use the manuscript.

There are various retellings of this “secret act,” known as the Lanckoronie affair, in Jewish and Frankist sources. It is hard to determine conclusively whether Frank invented this sexual antinomianism or borrowed it from the Dönmes. We know that the concept of the mystical marriage of a Jew and the Torah, and the ritual of Simhat Torah, was deeply rooted in Jewish mystical tradition. As I discuss later, we also know that sexual antinomianism was part of the Sabbatean circles from the beginning. The Dönme antinomianism was for the purpose of *mitzvah ha-ba’ah ba-averah* (commandment fulfilled by breaking another commandment).³² Therefore, there is a high probability that Frank took these practices from the Dönme circles and radicalized them. Scholem is perfectly right when he asserts that Frankism was “for generations nothing more than a radical offshoot of the Dönme, only with a Catholic façade.”³³ I also agree with Maciejko and Lenowitz, who argued that Frank, after converting to Christianity, slowly but consciously diverged from Sabbatean tradition. Nevertheless, I believe that in part he always remained Dönme.³⁴ Relations between the Frankists and the Dönmes indicate that these two subcultures were developing also through a dialogue with the outside world in the eighteenth century.

By the end of the eighteenth century, important religious and social developments were yet to happen within the Karakaş and Kapancı communities. Perhaps being the most influential Dönme leader after the first generation, Dervish Efendi (Judah Levi Tova, c.1700–c.1800) became instrumental in radically revising some of the Dönme precepts. He was an original thinker and social reformer, who wrote several mystical songs, hymns, Zohar commentaries, and kabbalistic treatises, combining the ideas of Sabbatai, Nathan, Cardozo, and Frank.³⁵

Scholem assumed that Dervish was of Kapancı origin.³⁶ But it seems to me that he was most likely a Karakaş because he became the communal leader right after the death of Osman Baba’s son Abdurrahman in 1781, and one of his students, Ambarci, assumed the communal leadership after him.³⁷ And the Ambarcis were buried in the Karakaş section of the Bülbülderesi cemetery (see Chapter 7). Contemporary oral and written traditions have conflicting claims about Darvish Efendi’s identity as well. For example, Ebu’l Mecdet claims that he was a Kapancı, who was extremely knowledgeable of both Islam and Judaism and knew several languages. According to him, Dervish rose to a

³² Scholem, “Redemption through Sin,” in his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 78–141.

³³ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect,” 160.

³⁴ It is rumored, for example, that there was a functioning Frankist community in Poland that remained in dialogue with the Karakaş as late as the 1960s.

³⁵ Some of his songs and hymns were published by Moshe Attias, *Shirot ve Tishbahot shel haShabtaut*, transcribed by M. Attias, annotated by G. Scholem, introduced by I. Ben-Zwi (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1947).

³⁶ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect,” 162.

³⁷ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 119.

sheikhdom in the Naksibendiye order. Ebu'l Mecdet mentions another interesting person from the nineteenth century, Karakaş Ibrahim Efendi, who excelled in Islamic knowledge so much that he came to be known as Hafiz Hoca. Several descendants of these two men became sheikhs and imams in Sufi lodges and mosques.³⁸

Dervish Efendi's followers included Hiyya Albo, who co-wrote some of Tova's hymns, and Shlomo Zahri (d.1800).³⁹ Similar to other Dönme literature, Dervish Efendi's works were in Judeo-Spanish, flavored with some Turkish and Hebrew. His literary works are of the greatest importance for understanding the religious concepts of the author and his group. His devotional hymns refer to spiritual love as well as physical love for the beloved, the messiah, and the Shekhina. For example, one of his Turkish poems (which also indicates a certain level of acculturation with Ottoman literature) is about longing for the messiah:

Your spirit is like a rosebud to me
Your word is like a nightingale evoking the spirit
That's why I sacrifice myself for you
I fell in love with you, oh, young man!
For you I cry, oh, [?]⁴⁰

Dervish Efendi's mystical commentaries contain intensive use of *gematria* and portions of the Torah, including *Lekh Lekha* and *Bereshit*.⁴¹ By far, his most controversial interpretation was about an antinomian sexual practice that came to be known as the “lamb festival” (see Chapter 6). In his commentary he defends the abrogation of the sexual prohibitions contained in the “Torah of Creation.” According to Ben-Zwi, he introduced a sort of “collective” marriage, wherein the women of the sect were married to all the men of the sect, basing his reform on obscure passages in the *Zohar* and other works of Kabbalah.⁴² Dervish Efendi was even rumored to practice sexual hospitality, and it seems that this practice would make its way to the Frankists as well.⁴³

The curious question is whether all of these radical ideas and practices were Dervish Efendi's inventions or if he simply took them from the Frankists or the earlier Dönmes. Sexual antinomianism was part of the Dönme tradition

³⁸ Ebu'l Mecdet, “Sabatayistlik,” *Türk Sesi*, no. 198, 9 Cemeazielevvel, 1342 (1924), 1–2.

³⁹ Shlomo Avayou, “The Religious Literature of the Judeo-Muslim Dönme,” in *Report of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies* (2003–2004): 21–31. I am grateful to Shlomo, who sent me the longer version of this article.

⁴⁰ *Ruhun Gül Goncasi bana fihadir/Sözün bülbül gibi ruha nadadır/Onun için canım sana fedadır/Aşkına düştüm, senin hey nevcivan/Senin için ağlarım, hey, ficam[?].* MS Ben Zwi 2272, hymn # 34. For the full poem, see Avayou, “The Religious Literature of the Judeo-Muslim Dönme.”

⁴¹ Molho and Shatz “A Sabbatian Commentary on Lekh-Lekha.”

⁴² Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 116.

⁴³ Maciejko, *Mixed Multitude*, 52. A practice whereby a host would offer his wife or daughter to a stranger coming as a guest to his house. It has been observed in some Frankist circles as well.

from the start, and it seems to me that Frank and Dervish Efendi radicalized it, perhaps while interacting with each other.

Dönmes among the Jews, Christians, and Muslims

Documents from the second half of the eighteenth century give us more details about the formation of a Dönme parallel space and time, as well as their religious and social acculturation with the outside world. A manuscript found at Harvard University, containing hundreds of hymns and songs from the 1750s, testifies to the fact that the Dönme liturgical materials were mainly in Ladino and partly in Turkish, and written with Hebrew characters.⁴⁴ They also show that there was a certain amount of acculturation among the Dönmes, Jews, and Turks. Since this manuscript was originally written in the 1750s, one could assume that hymns and songs in the collection were in circulation among the Dönmes even earlier. The dominant tone in these songs and hymns is an emotional state of yearning for the messiah. They are similar to the hymns and songs that Rosanes saw in a Dönme library in Salonica in 1915,⁴⁵ that Attias published in 1949,⁴⁶ and that Amarillo compiled in 1960.⁴⁷

A rabbinic *responsum* from 1765 confirms the Dönmes' continuing relationship with the Jewish community. As indicated earlier, it was not uncommon for Ottoman converts to continue their relationship with their former co-religionists. In a question addressed to Rabbi Ben-Shangi concerning the permissibility of giving an amulet to Dönmes, the rabbi says that the ancestors of those apostates have not abandoned their religion out of malice and wickedness but for a "reason best known to themselves." Now their descendants have embraced another religion out of free choice. Therefore, the rabbi concludes, no exception can be made for the writing of amulets for such "Shabbat-breakers."⁴⁸

However, not all rabbis were similar to Ben Shangi. On the contrary, some rabbis nurtured the hope of bringing the Dönmes back to the fold. Hayyim Palache (1787–1868), the famous chief rabbi of Izmir, refers to this book with

⁴⁴ Hebrew Ms. 80, Houghton Library, Harvard University. The manuscript was presented to Dr. Gerhard Kessler, professor of sociology at Istanbul University from 1933 to 1950, by one of his Dönme students. Kessler donated it to the Harvard Library. See Paul Fenton, "A New Collection of Sabbatean Hymns," in *Ha-Halom ve-Shivro*, ed. Rachel Elior (Jerusalem: Hugle-Mahshevut Yisrael, 2000), 329–351.

⁴⁵ Rosanes, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael*, IV: 49–92.

⁴⁶ Attias, *Shirot ve Tishbahot*. Many other unpublished Sabbatean hymns and songs are still deposited in the Ben-Zwi Archive. Elia Shaya's rather controversial work shows the ecstatic importance of those hymns and songs for a communal life. Elia Shaya, *Messiah of Incest: New and Uncensored History of the Sexual Element in Jewish Mystical Messianism* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2002).

⁴⁷ Abraham Amarillo, "Sabbatean Document from the Saul Amarillo Collection," *Sefunot* 5 (1961): 235–275. This collection originally was assembled around 1760 by a Salonica Scholar Rabbi Abraham Miranda (d. c. 1802) who gathered everything he found about the Dönmes.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Ben-Zwi, *The Exiled and Redeemed*, 311–312.

great respect, saying that “There is already a tradition from our rabbis and holy fathers not to speak good or evil concerning Sabbatai Sevi. ‘Neither shall you curse him nor shall you bless him.’”⁴⁹ As Rodrigue and Benbassa has shown, some of the leading rabbinical figures of the Ottoman Empire continued to be secret Jewish Sabbateans in later centuries. Several rabbis in Salonica and Izmir, such as Joseph b. David, Meir Bikayam, Abraham Miranda, Abraham Rovigo, and Samuel Primo were secret Sabbateans. Their activities continued, as evidenced in the publication of a three-volume set of Sabbatean writings under the title of *Hemdat Yamim*.⁵⁰ *Hemdat*, which was published anonymously in Izmir in 1731–1732 and went into many editions, became a bestseller among Ottoman Jewry.⁵¹

Accounts of consuls and travelers are our other resources for knowledge about Dönme life in the “dark ages.” Consuls had an interest in and knowledge of the Dönmes, in part because of the employment of Dönmes in embassies. Early internationalization of the Dönmes became possible through such contacts. Porter, an English consul, writing in 1768, was puzzled by the fact that the Turks did not recognize the Dönmes’ secret life. But, he adds, maybe the Turks knew about it, but their cosmopolitanism allowed for the existence of sectarian life. As explained in the next chapter, Porter was indeed right about Ottoman indifference toward the crypto-communities in different parts of the empire.

They profess publicly the Mahometan religion, and retain privately the Jewish rites, much on the principle of the Ebionites, among the first Christians: they intermarry, inhabit together in the same part of the town, and never mix with Mahometans, except on business and commerce, or in the mosches: they never frequent a synagogue nor acknowledge their schism. It is difficult to conceive how they remain unnoticed by the Turks; or rather, it shows with how easy a composition the Turks are content in these matters . . . though were these Jewish Mahometans publicly to profess both, they would be instantly made a public example: death is the doom of an apostate.⁵²

Porter was aware that the Dönmes could not return to Judaism openly, since such an act could result in death under the Ottoman legal system. His account demonstrates that the Dönme open secret subculture was fully formed by the second half of the eighteenth century.

Writing in 1777, Arasy, a longtime French consul to Salonica, refers to them as *mamins* and estimates their number at about 5,000 out of 70,000

⁴⁹ Cited in Naor, *Post-Sabbatian Sabbatianism*, 10.

⁵⁰ Aaron Rodrigue and Ester Benbassa, *The Jews of the Balkans* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 59. For the Sabbatean content of *Hemdat Yamim*, see Moshe Fogel, “The Sabbatian Character of *emdat Yamim*,” in *Ha-Halom ve-Shivro*, 365–423.

⁵¹ Barnai, “From Sabbateanism to Modernization,” 75.

⁵² James Porter, *Observations on the Religion, Law, and Government of the Turks* (London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1768), II: 40–41.

inhabitants in the city. This is the first known historical account of the Dönme population. To him, “the Jews, the Greeks and the *maaminim* are devoted to industry and the commerce,” but not the Turks.⁵³ In those years Salonica had a greater value of exports than the total of Istanbul and Edirne combined. For example, from 1780 to 1790, the export of goods from Turkey into France amounted to 7,000,000 livres [350,000 pounds] out of which 3,500,000 livres came from Salonica and 2,000,000 livres from Istanbul and Edirne, and 1,500,000 livres from Morea.⁵⁴ In this century, while most of the Ottoman cities were in economic decline, Salonica began recovering its economic importance by the establishment of English, French, Italian, and later Austrian trade posts and consulates that renewed their trade privileges, as well as by new commerce with Russian trade ships after the Ottoman-Russian Treaty in 1774.

The introduction of the European powers into the empire started to change the dynamics of the relationship between Ottoman Muslims and non-Muslims, and provided increasingly new opportunities and support for the latter. Once the Greek population of the empire was greatly reduced in business after Greek independence, Dönmes and Jews came to dominate trade and commerce in Salonica. Since the Dönmes passed as Muslims, they were in a better position to take full advantage of economic opportunities in the empire. These developments were the main reasons that Jews and Dönmes were increasingly globalizing and had grown in economic power by the arrival of the nineteenth century. Also, several of them acquired protection or citizenship from European countries in those years.

Having only traveled to Istanbul and not Salonica in 1867, the German-Danish traveler Niebuhr wrote that there were about 600 families of this “new religion” in Salonica, known as “Dolmäh,” who only associated with themselves and did not intermarry with others.⁵⁵ To Niebuhr, the Dönmes prioritize the *Song of Songs* over any other holy book, do not observe the Sabbath, rarely go to mosque, and predict that the messiah will reappear in 125 years. There were several merchants among them who were able to buy an exemption from military service. At the end of his account he refers to the Frankist movement, and asserts that Frank became a follower of Osman Baba and spread his teaching in Poland, where, after a dispute with Jews, he converted to Catholicism.

Based on these accounts, can we estimate the size of the Dönme population by the eighteenth century? Could a community of roughly 200 to 300

⁵³ Cited in Mihalio Lascaris, *Salonique: A La Fin du XIII Siecle* (Athens: Flamma, 1939), 17–18.

⁵⁴ Louis-Auguste Beaujour, *A View of the Commerce of Greece* (London: Printed by H. L. Galabin, 1800), 382.

⁵⁵ Niebuhr, “Von Verschiedenen Nationen.” He gathered his information from a Constantinople rabbi and a Salonican Jew (who learned some of his information from a Dönme family who had fled the plague to Livorno during the Turco-Russian War of 1768–1774) whom he met in Copenhagen in the 1780s.

families (about 1,000–1,500 people, since it is estimated that the Ottoman families had four or five members on average) at the beginning of the eighteenth century grow into a community of 600 families (about 3,000 people) as Niebuhr argued, or 5,000 people as Arasy argued, at the end of the century? Given the pace of population growth in the empire in that century, it seems unlikely to have grown from 1,000–1,500 people to 5,000 souls in a century. If the latter figure is fairly accurate, then it is more likely that their numbers were already large at the start of the century. The Catholic priest and historian Henri Gregoire, writing in 1829, claimed that there was another crypto-Jewish community in Salonica whose members were frequently confused with the followers of Sevi. A number of Jewish bankers of this city having been condemned to death by the pasha “some century and a half ago” managed to save their lives and property by undergoing a nominal conversion and embracing Islam—perhaps thirty families. They then numbered, claimed the Bishop, from 100 to 150 families, and continued to follow in private the strict observance of the Jewish religion.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, I have not seen any other source that would corroborate this information. One wonders, however, whether Arasy or Niebuhr had heard this information and included these numbers in their estimates. In any case, it is reasonable to assume that the Dönme population by the turn of the nineteenth century was somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 souls. Cousinéry, who was another French ambassador to Salonica around the beginning of the nineteenth century, estimates that they numbered about 500 families. He explains that the Turks called them as *Dunme* because they “practice the religion of Moses,” and everyone knew that “they were always Jews.”⁵⁷ By the mid-nineteenth century, most of the estimates were close to 5,000 people, and by the end of the century, close to 10,000 people.⁵⁸

Most of these estimates, however, were based on the Salonican population. Unfortunately, there is no way to have a conclusive figure about the total Dönme population, in part because they did not live exclusively in Salonica. From other accounts we understand that the Dönmes lived in other major centers of the empire as well. For example, traveling in Greece in 1804, Leake confirms that *maaminim* were the “wealthiest Turks” in Salonica, and also mentions a certain Hasan Adjik, whose brother lived in Istanbul.

⁵⁶ Henri Gregoire, *Histoire des Sectes* (Paris: Baudouin, 1829), III: 340.

⁵⁷ Esprit Cousinéry, *Voyage dans la Macédoine* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1831), II: 19–20.

⁵⁸ The population estimates from different periods were about 5,000 according to Best, *Excursions in Albania*, 228; 5,000 to Edward Dodd, “Mission to the Jews,” *42nd Annual Report of the ABCFMA* (Boston: The Board, 1851), 62; 4,000 to Ritter Hahn, “Über die Bevölkerung von Salonic und die dortige Secte der Deumme” *Reise durch die Gebiete des Drin und Wardar* (Wien: Aus der K.-K. Hof, 1869), 154; 8,000 to Theodore Bent, “Peculiar People,” *Longman’s Magazine* (November 1887): 24; 8,000–10,000 to Abraham Danon, “Une Secte Judeo-Musulmane en Turquie,” *Revue des Etudes Juives*, (1897), 264; 10,000 to an English report from 1910, cited in Elie Kedourie, “Young Turks, Freemason and Jews,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 7 (1971): 95; and 15,000 to Yitzhak Ben-Zwi, “The Sabbatharians at the Present Time,” *Metzudah*, 7 (1954), 331.

Inheriting the Jewish spirit of parsimony and industry, they are generally rich and among them are some of the wealthiest Turks at Saloniki. Hasan Adjik, one of the ministers at Constantinople, and his brother, who is Gumrukji, or collector of the customs at Saloniki, are *Mamins*. They are naturally objects of extreme dislike to the idle, poor, and profligate Janissaries of the lower class. They go to mosque regularly and conform to the Mahometan religion in externals, but are reproached by the other Turks with having secret meetings and ceremonies, with other peculiarities of which the best attested is their knowledge of the Spanish language. They are said to be divided into three tribes, two of whom will not intermarry with the third, nor will the latter give their daughters in marriage to the *Osmalnis*.⁵⁹

Leake's account is the first available source mentioning the existence of the subsects, their secret meetings, prayers, economic power, external conformity with Islam, and the greater society's dislike of them.

Kieffer and Bianchi's definition of the term Dönme in 1835 is in conformity with other French accounts. To them, the group was called *maamin* by Europeans and *deunme* by the Turks. They also note that their core business was in tobacco, which is why the Port calls them *douhan tudjari thaifesi*, the "community of tobacco merchants."⁶⁰ This was confirmed in another account from the 1850s: "They are principally engaged in the trade of tobacco used for smoking, whence they are designated in the official acts of the Port as *douhan tudjari thaifesi*."⁶¹

Peter Beer⁶² and then Mayers both seem to borrow most of their information from Niebuhr in portraying the Dönmes in the 1820s, and call them Zoharite Jews.⁶³ Mayers confuses some of the historical facts, including a claim that Osman Baba was Jacob's son, but overall he captures the basics of Dönme life in Salonica.⁶⁴ Demonstrating the existing tension with the other communities. Best, who visited the town in the 1830s, writes that the Dönmes were "unfortunate fellows, being despised by all, whether Jews, Greeks, or Turks."⁶⁵

Based on these accounts, we can say that the Dönme subsects had created their full-fledged post-messianic parallel world and unique Kabbalistic universe by the eighteenth century. In public they began to excel in industry and trade of export-import materials, including textiles and tobacco, as well as

⁵⁹ William Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece* (London: J. Rodwell, 1835), III: 250.

⁶⁰ Kieffer, *Dictionnaire Turk-Français*.

⁶¹ Abraham Uobicini, *Letters on Turkey* (London: J. Murray, 1856), II: 357–358.

⁶² Beer, *Religiosen Sekten*, 294.

⁶³ Mayers, *A Brief Account of the Zoharite Jews*, 14–15.

⁶⁴ Scholem argues that Mayers's pamphlet was a translation of part of Beer's book. See Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 359. Although the pamphlet is a rough translation of Beer's book into English, Mayers adds many interesting details to his account. He claims, for example, that Jacob persuaded the Jews that Sabbatai was still alive but concealed, and he would re-appear at the end of a certain number of years.

⁶⁵ Best, *Excursions*, 228–229.

to hold governmental posts as customs officers and civil servants. This globalized community and its double life was thus well known to outsiders, especially to the Europeans—but only on the surface.

Christian Missionaries “Discover” the Dönmes

Missionaries, especially Protestants from England and the United States, were the first outsiders who were able to penetrate the Dönme open secret, starting from the early nineteenth century. Their records revise and expand what we knew about the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dönmes. As the Ottoman Empire went through its most serious domestic and international challenges, it also experienced intensive missionary activities in its territory, originally targeting the Jews and “nominal” Christians. During their expeditions, missionaries “discovered” several crypto-communities including the Dönmes in major centers of the empire. Before they arrived at their destinations, missionaries read the available books about these places and that gave them repetitious, sometimes mistaken, information. Over time, their interest in different communities generated many reports, letters, and articles about them. These reports were written with a clear Christian overtone, but critically used, they provide us with very detailed accounts of the social, cultural, religious, and economic lives of those communities. Assuming that the Dönmes were crypto-Jews, missionaries combined their mission to the Jews and Dönmes and began their proselytizing among them in the 1820s. Interestingly, in both the missionary and *Alliance Israelite Universelle* records, which began in the 1860s, the Eastern Jews and Dönmes bear striking similarities to one another. Both groups were seen as unenlightened, uneducated, and stagnant. The missionary reports add, however, that they were open to the gospel and “light” and as “messianic,” they were ready for conversion more than any other group.

One of the earliest missionary accounts about the Dönmes is provided to us by a German missionary. Josep Wolff, a convert from Judaism himself, heard from a certain Jew, Mr. S. in Alexandria in 1824, that “there are still some Jews at Salonichi, by name of Molcho and Kordo, who outwardly profess Mahomedanism, but they never intermarry with Mahomedans.”⁶⁶ In 1828, Wolff visited the town himself and met several Dönmes. To him, the chief of the Dönmes was Khair Allah Effendi [sic], who allegedly said that Sabbatai “had not pretended to be the Messiah, but believed that Jesus of Nazareth had been the Messiah, but he asserted that the Law of Moses had been abolished, and that even adultery was no longer a sin.” Then Wolff reports:

They are reading continually the Zohar, and never intermarry with the Mussulmans, and give either their daughters to the Jews turned Mussulmans or to

⁶⁶ Joseph Wolff, *Missionary Journal and Memoir* (London: Duncan, 1824), 122.

Christians. . . . At Salonichi are five hundred houses of that sect, and the chief of them are called Ahmet Effendi, (with the Jewish name Berahia,) and Isaac Ef-fendi, (his Jewish name is Jemah). There are a few of them likewise at Smyrna.”⁶⁷

Wolff’s naïve assumption (or wishful thinking) about the Dönmes’ proximity to Christianity was also common among other Protestant missionaries. In these years, first the British and Foreign Bible Society, then the American Board of Committees for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), and finally the Scottish Bible Society sent several missionaries to the empire. Visiting Salonica in 1826, Benjamin Barker of the British and Foreign Bible Society testifies once again that the Dönmes were “secret Jews” but “Turks externally in order to enjoy the same privilege with them.” He was also the first one to give the names of the Sabbatean subgroups:

The Jewish-Turks are a sect whom, I have never heard mentioned before, although they tell me that some of them exist at Constantinople. They are called by the Turkish *Donmehes*, or renegados, and are divided in three separate classes; viz. *Bezestenlithes*, *Ghoniothes*, and *Cavalieros*. Each class is distinct, as they do not intermarry, nor have they any kind of connexion one with the other, or with the Turks. It is generally supposed that they still retain many of their Jewish ceremonies and observances, and many think that in secret they are still Jews. In public they affect not to know but the Turkish language, and in their families they often speak the Jewish Spanish. They have Rabbis, or preachers, in their private worship, and publicly they go to the mosque. Their circumcision takes place, as with the Jews, about eight days after the birth of the child; whilst, if they followed the Turkish custom, that ceremony ought to be delayed several years. . . . It is the firm opinion of many, that they are only Turks externally, in order that they may enjoy the same privilege with them.⁶⁸

Now we also learn that, by the nineteenth century, the Dönmes continued to speak Spanish, and they had rabbis in their private meetings. After the British missionaries, American missionaries developed an even deeper interest in the Dönmes. Josiah Brewer was the first American missionary who reported the existence of the Dönmes in Salonica in 1827. It seems that Brewer owes his information to British Barker, since he repeats almost verbatim what Barker wrote about them the previous year.⁶⁹

In the early 1830s, the ABCFM appointed William Schauffler (1798–1883) to oversee the Jewish and Dönme missions in the empire. He almost singlehandedly founded the mission to the Jews and Dönmes, and worked among them for almost thirty years. In 1830, a year before Schauffler arrived at Istanbul,

⁶⁷ Joseph Wolff, *Missionary Journal*, 314–315.

⁶⁸ “Extracts from Mr. Barker’s Journal,” 23rd Report of British and Foreign Bible Society (London: Printed for the Society by J. Tilling, 1827), 79. For a translation of this letter into Turkish, see Esra Danacioglu, “Selanik Yahudileri ve Dönmeler Hakkında Üç Mektup,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 4 (1994): 26–28.

⁶⁹ Josiah Brewer, *A Residence at Constantinople* (New Haven, CT: Durrie and Peck, 1830), 293–294.

the United States and the Ottoman Empire signed a treaty that marked a historic turning point for the two countries. The treaty gave great privileges to the Americans who wanted to open diplomatic offices, engage in trade, or travel in the empire. This created a very favorable atmosphere for the missionaries who increased their activities after this date.

With Schauffler's strong recommendation, ABCFM's mission to the Jews expanded considerably in the years when "the center and principal seat of the mission to the Jews" moved from Istanbul to Salonica in 1849.⁷⁰ First, Edward M. Dodd, Eliphal Maynard, and their wives, and then Justin W. Parsons, Homer Morgan, and their wives labored among the Jews and Dönmes in Salonica.⁷¹ Until the station was closed in 1856, they worked among the Dönmes, mainly in Salonica, met them on several occasions, and wrote extensive reports and articles about them. About the inscrutable moral character of the Dönme community, Dodd speaks very favorably: "Of all the inhabitants of Salonica they are the noblest, not excepting Greeks or Turks. In business transactions I always go to a *Zoharite*, if possible, as they are more honest than any other. They are very accessible, fond of conversation, ready to talk on religious subjects, with less-conceit than rabbinitists; and their religious views offer no greater, if as great, obstacle to labor among them."⁷² In an article on the Dönmes published in 1851, Schauffler summarizes the findings of his team for the outside world.⁷³ He reports that he was able to communicate with the Dönme elders and "penetrate" their secrets for the first time. To Schauffler, the Dönmes were "properly speaking, a Jewish sect." In one of their meetings, a Dönme "chief man" told Schauffler about the articles of their faith and prayers. With an introduction and short summary of the Sabbatean movement, Schauffler published this first authentic Dönme confession that reveals the depth of kabbalistic thought and messianic aspirations, arguably written in Turkish within the Dönme community. This kabbalistic text stands as the earliest available testimony of Sabbatean beliefs. It describes the role of the messiah in such a way that one could think the Dönme conception of the messiah was quite similar to the Christian conception of the messiah, who came to redeem sinners from the original sin committed by Adam.⁷⁴

In 1856, after several decades with little success, the missionary organizations realized that they were not likely to find many more Jews or Dönmes to

⁷⁰ Rufus Anderson, "Letters to the Salonica Missions, 1850," Harvard-Houghton Library, ABC 8.1: Miscellaneous, v. 5.

⁷¹ Rufus Anderson, "A letter to the Brethren of the Mission to the Jews at Salonica, July 7, 1851," Harvard-Houghton Library, ABC 8.1: Miscellaneous, v. 5.

⁷² Dodd, "Mission to the Jews," 63.

⁷³ William Schauffler, "Shabbathai Zevi and His Followers," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 2 (1851): 3–26.

⁷⁴ For Schauffler and his article see, Cengiz Sisman, "An American Missionary and an Ottoman Dönme: William G. Schauffler (1798–1881) and His Report on a Dönme Kabalistic Text in Turkish," in *Ottoman World: Foundational Coexistences*, ed. Devrim Umit (New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

convert to Christianity, and as a result they ceased their proselytizing efforts among them. Even so, the prolonged encounter with these British and American missionaries was one of the factors that gradually pushed the Dönmes and Jews of Salonica to adopt Western ideas and lifestyles. Fittingly, reflecting on their influence on Jews and Dönmes, Dodd claims that “no doubt intercourse with us has had much to do in this very process of social and intellectual awakening and enlightening.”⁷⁵ As I have argued elsewhere, although the missionaries admitted their failure in proselytizing Jews and Dönmes and discontinued their mission, they were, in a way, successful, since their activities contributed to the sects’ transformation and modernization, and by implication, to that of Ottoman society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁶

This was also the time when the Turkish, Jewish, Greek, and Dönme youth began going to Europe for education and exposing themselves to modern ideas. As Ortaylı points out, nineteenth-century Ottoman society had been going through a radical Westernization process, at the end of which cultural and institutional dualism in every community was inescapable.⁷⁷

Ottoman Officials “Discover” the Dönmes

The open secret of the Dönmes that was learned or noticed by foreign visitors as well as many of the inhabitants of Salonica came to the attention of Ottoman officials in the nineteenth century, if not earlier. The first available Ottoman document from 1834 does not call them by the popular term, Dönme, but Avdeti, a term after that became part of the Ottoman parlance. According to this document, several members of the Salonican “Avdeti Community” had been engaged in the stocking business (*çorapçı*) in Istanbul, and sent their males to Istanbul. Because of the lack of enough young people in Salonica the officials had difficulty conscripting enough soldiers in Salonica.⁷⁸ Another document, dated 1846, refers to them as Dönmes, who with Jews and Orthodox Christians, underreported their properties to the tax collectors.⁷⁹ Yet another one, dated 1852, refers to a certain Ahmet, as Dönme Ahmet Efendi, who had a runaway black female slave.⁸⁰

In these official documents, the Dönmes are mentioned without much value judgment attached. But in time, claims and allegations about the Dönmes in

⁷⁵ “Letters from Mr. Dodd,” *Missionary Herald* (Boston: November 1850), 386.

⁷⁶ For more about the missionary impact on the Dönmes, see Cengiz Sisman, “Failed Proselytizers or Modernizers? Protestant Missionaries among the Jews and Sabbatians/Dönmes in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, forthcoming, 2016.

⁷⁷ İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yuz yılı* (İstanbul: Timas, 2009), 30–37.

⁷⁸ BOA, HAT # 0318-18,700.

⁷⁹ BOA MVL #41/18.

⁸⁰ BOA HR.TO # 169/39. I am thankful to Dilek Akyalçın who provided me with the last two documents.

Ottoman documents became more detailed and also began to resemble the way they were written about by consuls, travelers, and missionaries.

The Ottoman officials knew about the existence of the Dönmes as well as other crypto-communities all along, but they were disinterested in their private lives. Reasons and implications of this imperial “don’t ask don’t tell” policy certainly requires a separate study. As Reinkowski notes, before the nineteenth century, Muslim empires were content with co-existence with these groups as long as minimal requirements of obedience were guaranteed, but with the increasing appeal of the emerging nation-states the empires demanded unambiguous confessions of loyalty from their subjects concerning religion and other matters.⁸¹

A preliminary study on the subject suggests that there could be additional crypto-communities in the empire, as it seems the empire was the paradise for the crypto-identities. For example, in Tzedopoulos’s term, “public secret” communities such as the Alevis and Yezidis in Anatolia, Kromlides of Pontus,⁸² Hemşinlis of Trabzon,⁸³ Istavris of Yozgat,⁸⁴ Bogomils of Bosnia, Vallahades of Macedonia,⁸⁵ and Shparataks of Albania⁸⁶ enjoyed their open secret crypto-lives in different parts of the empire.⁸⁷ Dated 1859, an Ottoman document implies that those people were “left to their own devices (*kendi hallerinde bırakıldığı*) in the previous centuries.”⁸⁸ The existence of some of these groups was confirmed by the crypto-faith adherents as well as Ottoman authorities. For example, from a petition to the Ministry of Interior in 1901, we learn that some of the Istavris requested to openly register their births in the population registers, since they had been “outwardly (*zahiren*) Muslim but inwardly (*batinen*) Rum (orthodox Christian)” and their neighbors called them “those of two religions.”⁸⁹ From another petition to the Ministry of Justice in 1902, the Greek Orthodox patriarch describes Istavris as the people “who were inwardly Christian, [but] because of the requirements of the times appeared

⁸¹ Maurus Reinkowski, “Hidden Believers, Hidden Apostates: The Phenomenon of Crypto-Jews and Crypto-Christians in the Middle-East,” in *Converting Cultures: Religion, Ideology and Transformations of Modernity*, ed. Dennis Washburn (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 409–433.

⁸² Yorgo Andreadis, *Gizli Din Tasiyanlar* (İstanbul: Belge, 1999).

⁸³ Antony Bryer, “The Crypto-Christians of the Pontos and Concil William Gifford Palgrave of Trebizond,” *DELTIO* 4(1983): 17–34.

⁸⁴ Yorgos Tzedopoulos, “Public Secrets: Crypto-Christianity in the Pontos,” *DELTIO* 16 (2009): 165–210.

⁸⁵ Bruce Clark, *Twice as Stranger: The Mass Expulsion that Forged Modern Greece and Turkey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁸⁶ Stavro Skendi, “Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans,” *Slavic Review* 26: 2 (1967): 227–246.

⁸⁷ For a general discussion on the Christian crypto-communities, see İlber Ortaylı, “Tanzimat Döneminde Tanassur ve Din Değiştirme Olayları,” *Tanzimatin 150. Yıldönümü Sempozyumu* (Ankara: TTK, 1994); Heath Lowry, *The Islamization and Turkification of the City of Trabzon, ca. 1486–1583* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 111–154.

⁸⁸ BOA, I-Har. #8922.

⁸⁹ BOA DH.MKT 494/18, Enclosure 24. Cited in Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 126.

as Muslims for a period, [and] have been recognized as Christians since the Tanzimat.”⁹⁰

After the Reform Edict (1856), which abolished (or permanently delayed) the punishment for “apostasy,” and the First Constitution (1876), which guaranteed religious freedom, some of these crypto-communities revealed themselves and reverted to Christianity. The Dönmes did not. Why? As Deringil demonstrates in his study, in the late nineteenth century perhaps no issue was as politically charged as that of conversion and apostasy. The domestic and international social and political tensions caused by conversion and apostasy cases led ultimately to their being perceived as an “imperial headache (*tasdi-i Ali*)” in the nineteenth century.⁹¹ These cases functioned as “a negotiating space by various actors: the state, Muslim subjects, non-Muslim communities and individuals, foreign powers trying to further sum-zero interests, refugees from political persecution, and the plain opportunists.”⁹² The execution of an Armenian “apostate” in 1843 increased the foreign, especially British, pressure on the Port, and the sultan had to ban the legal execution of apostates from Islam with vague language in 1844.⁹³ In a cabinet meeting in 1857, the punishment for apostasy was determined to be exile.⁹⁴ These radical legal changes paved the way for Muslims and for those of crypto-faiths to convert to other religions, as in the cases of Kromlides and Istavris.⁹⁵

Again, why did not the Dönmes attempt to revert during the Tanzimat period when the time was ripe? First, unlike Kromlides and Istavris who were living in relatively isolated mountain villages, the Dönmes were an urban community and socially much more embedded in their surroundings. Second, they would not want to revert to Judaism, as they were post-messianic Jews. Third, even if they wanted to revert, the Jewish authorities would not have accepted them because of their alleged “*mamzer* (bastard)” origin. Last, and perhaps most important, their philosophy of the *burden of silence* would not have allowed them to make their dual existence known. Some of them did in the long run only through education and modernization (see Chapter 7).

Within this historical context, it is possible to understand some of the Ottoman officials’ suspicions and changing attitudes toward the crypto-communities by the second half of the nineteenth century. A detailed series of archival documents from 1862 gives us clues concerning official

⁹⁰ BOA DH.MKT 494/18, Enclosure 28. Cited in Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 136.

⁹¹ Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 7, 67.

⁹² Deringil., *Conversion and Apostasy*, 257.

⁹³ Turgut Subaşı, “The Apostasy Question in the Context of Anglo-Ottoman Relations, 1843–44,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38: 2 (2002): 1–34.

⁹⁴ Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 76.

⁹⁵ For example, Hanula bat Yehuda Polit converted to Islam and married a Muslim. After a while she reverted to Judaism and divorced her husband, Shabbatai Politi, in Izmir in 1879. In yet another example, the daughter of Moshe Yani converted to Islam with her husband. The couple, both from Izmir, reverted to Judaism in 1852. See Bornstein-Makovetsky, “Jewish Converts to Islam.”

suspicions about the Dönmes, for instance. According to these documents, the governor of Salonica, Hüsnü Pasha, developed an interest in the Dönmes after receiving a complaint, and he became obsessed with the idea of uncovering their “secrets.” One day, taking advantage of the disappearance of a certain Şerif Çavuş, he stormed into one of the Dönme houses, where he found some interesting artifacts: a sword handle, decorated and inscribed with the name of Suleiman the Magnificent; another Persian sword handle, inscribed with gold; a big bloody knife, a flagellation set, and several sticks. Hüsnü Pasha petitioned the Port, asking permission to investigate the issue further. Unlike in previous centuries, now each apostasy/conversion case needed to be dealt with by the top bureaucrats, including the grand vizier and the sultan in the capital. Due to the delicacy of these issues in those days, the Port asked him to investigate the case “with [caution and] care.” In his reply, the governor reported:

The woman who lives in the house was interrogated by the judge, mufti, accountant, customs officer, Mehmed from the steering committee, head of the investigative committee, İbrahim Bey, and myself. It was understood that the blood did not belong to Şerif Çavuş, but someone from the aforementioned group. It is also understood that this group outwardly passes as Muslim but its members [are actually] one of the sects of Judaism in spirit. It seems that they had been punishing transgressor males and females by flagellation. Also they have secretly been executing those who had an inclination toward Islam. This mentioned house is used as a council and punishment place where by night, the male elders (whose names are known), and by day, female elders meet and conduct trials and even sometimes imprison the offenders. We suspect that this matter revolves around a type of corruption and hypocrisy.⁹⁶

Striking here is seeing the Ottoman authorities acknowledge that the Dönmes were “Jewish in spirit” and that they had parallel organizations, including meeting houses, courts, and torture places—yet they did not take any further action on the issue. It is interesting that such radical measures, such as monitoring, disciplining, and punishing, were exercised on transgressors by the Yakubis, who would assimilate faster than the Kapancıs and Karakaş by the turn of the twentieth century. Probably referring to the same event, J. G. Hahn, a German traveler whose information was based on information from the consul general of the Netherlands, Cheval Carboneri in Salonica, gives a different date of 1855 and relates that Hüsnü Pasha stormed into a walled Dönme house, where he found no one but an old lady. In a big and round room, oriental seats (*divan*) around the corners, an ancient Persian sword and a long knife were hung on the wall. In an underground room, he found a lash.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ BOA, A.MKT.UM # 572/1.

⁹⁷ Hahn, “Über die Bevölkerung von Salonic,” 154–155.

The same event was narrated by Yakubi Yalman, who tells that the old lady was Nimettullah Kadın, whose silence could not be broken by Hüsnü Pasha.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, we do not have further information as to how this affair ended, but we know that Hüsnü Pasha's interest in the Dönmes did not fade after this case.

Although he does not give a date, Hahn relates another interesting story about a Dönme boy who asked to convert to Islam before the *kadi* of Salonica during the days of Hüsnü Pasha. The affair was related to the pasha who asked the boy to reconsider his decision, and if he still insisted on it, then come back and complete the conversion. But the boy never returned. When the Dönmes were asked about the boy, first they said that he was traveling, then they reported that he had died. When the corpse was dug out of the grave, it showed traces of strangulation.⁹⁹ As one of the Eighteen Commandments prescribed, the Dönmes had effectively silenced the transgressor. Unfortunately, we do not have further information about this case. As the communities started to lose ground to assimilation and modernization in the nineteenth century, the communal rules and regulations became stricter. As seen in the Şerif Çavuş case, and discussed further in the next chapter, there was an increase in violence within the Dönme communities to which transgressors were subjected in those days. Ben-Zwi's description of the Karakaş leaders in the century confirms the inner violence:

Othman Baba's successors were called, like the successors to the founder of the Moslem religion, "Caliphs" or "Sahibs." Their "priests" [the Cohens] carry a green banner; other families (such as the Russos, Florentines, Girons) carry a red-white banner. One of Darwish Effendi's successors, Ambargi, ruled his community despotically in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although blind and crippled, he was a blood-thirsty despot, who led his community with a ruthlessness that earned him the designation "Temurlenk" (Tamerlane), after the Tatar King.¹⁰⁰

In another incident in 1864, Ahmed Safi reports that a member of the Yakubi sect, called Kambur, approached one of the Ottoman notables in Salonica, Abdullah Bey, and revealed to him certain Dönme secrets. Kambur reportedly said that a Yakubi house called the "Saadethane" contained some of the possessions of Sabbatai and Yakub Çelebi. Abdullah Bey passed this information to Hüsnü Pasha who, with his men, broke into the house:

The late Hüsnü Pasha, when he was the governor of Salonica, [and] with the help of agents and spies stormed into the house (*somenat*), that the *Terpuşlu taifesi*, the *Yakubis*, considered a temple, and found out two chest boxes; a sword that Sultan Selim III granted to a *serbetdar* (keeper of the imperial sherbet) from the same *taife*; and few gifts granted to someone from the same *taife* by the late governor

⁹⁸ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfasi."

⁹⁹ Hahn, "Über die Bevölkerung von Salonica," 155.

¹⁰⁰ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 119.

of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Pasha. Although Hüsnü Pasha insisted upon opening up the chests, the [members of the] aforementioned group surrounded the house. The rich and notable members approached the Pasha and told him: “You insist on opening up the chests but you cannot do it without an absolute order from the Sultan. The moment you get his order from Istanbul, then you can open them.” Pasha understood that his insistence could cause a revolt if he pushed it further. He sealed the chests and assigned officers to make sure that the boxes could not be taken out. Explaining the political rationale for opening the chests, he sent a telegram to the Porte at once, asking the permission. However, the *Terpuslu taifesi* acted faster than the Pasha and, by virtue of paying a bribe of five to six thousand *liras*, they had the Pasha reappointed as a governor in Yanya.¹⁰¹

Bent’s account corresponds to that of Safi, telling that the pasha wanted “to publicly denounc[e] them as only pretended followers of the prophet.” When they heard the news, the community dispatched influential people to Istanbul. By bribing authorities with “a sum not less than 10,000,” they were able to get the pasha removed from Salonica.¹⁰² Referring to Hüsnü Pasha’s obsession with the Dönmes with sarcasm, Ibnu'l Emin relates an anecdote from his father:

Hüsnü Pasha had spies who had been following the *Avdetis* and secretly monitoring their rituals and prayers from windows and roofs. He had been warned about the depravity of his act, but he paid no attention to them. What if they said “We were Jews”? Would he have massacred thousands of people?¹⁰³

After giving the account of the Hüsnü Pasha event, Yalman relates another official attempt to uncover the Dönme secrets by Mithat Pasha, who was appointed the new governor in Salonica in 1873. The new governor realized that some of the state clerks wore distinctive clothes and kept their heads shaven all the time. He inquired about them and realized that they were of Dönme origin. He forbade the clerks to shave their heads and forced them to change their clothing habits. But similar to the attempt of Hasan Pasha in 1722, neither Hüsnü Pasha nor Mithat Pasha was able to unearth the Dönme “secrets.” However, with the rise of a “liberated” Dönme generation and the introduction of “modern” schools into the Dönme communities in the early 1870s, some of these secrets were disclosed by their own members, who were disillusioned with the traditional structure of their communities.

¹⁰¹ Ahmed Safi, *Dönmeler Adeti*, 58–59.

¹⁰² Bent, “Peculiar People,” 24–36.

¹⁰³ Ibnu'l Emin, *Son Sadrazamlar* (Istanbul: Dergah, 1982), IV: 1798–1799.

STUDYING THE RELIGIOUS AND “inner” life of crypto-communities is inherently difficult, explaining why most of the studies on the Dönmes, including that of Baer and Akyalçın, limit themselves to the social and economic history of the community. As a matter of fact, we are still far away from a systematic exposition of the Dönme Kabbala and religious life. Compared to other Ottoman crypto-communities mentioned in the previous chapter, however, we know relatively more about the Dönmes’ religious and private lives. In what follows I would like to make a digression from historical narrative and attempt to explicate some elements of the Dönme Kabbala (some of its aspects including the burden of silence were already discussed throughout the book) and crypto-religious, social, and institutional developments in the Dönmes history.

Unlike Marranos and Moriscos who lived their religion mostly individually, Dönmes formed crypto-communities that systematically transmitted their knowledge and kabbalistic understanding to the next generation. Communal needs are different from individual needs. A community needs leaders, doctrines, meeting places, worship houses, laws, courts, cemeteries, rites and rituals, hymns, songs, calendars, festivals, and even mythologies. If it is a secret community, it also needs a mechanism to keep its identity and secrets under control. In order to sustain their lifestyle, the Dönmes created a space and time zone parallel to that of the larger society, with their own idiosyncratic theological arguments and social practices that enabled them to form secret “self-governments.” These self-governments were ruled by a two-headed leadership. While religious affairs were handled by religious leaders, secular/worldly affairs were managed by lay leaders. In Ninian Smart’s terminology (see the introduction), the Dönme religion fulfilled all the six dimensions: the practical and the ritual; the experiential and the emotional; the narrative and the mythic; the doctrinal and the philosophical; the ethical and the legal; and the social, institutional, and material in a parallel universe.¹ All of these

¹ Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11–22.

dimensions and institutions, some of which are discussed in the following pages, were instrumental in transmitting Dönme knowledge and Dönme Kabbala over the centuries.

The Eighteen Commandments as a Kabbalistic Constitution

The Eighteen Commandments are the most important of the Dönme principles that aimed to provide social and spiritual guidance for the group until the imagined messianic times. In a sense, they served as worldly and spiritual constitutions for the Dönme communities. It is not clear when exactly the commandments were formulated, but the Dönme tradition accepts that the text was dictated, or at least tacitly agreed to, by Sevi himself during his lifetime. It is hard to believe that Sevi was the author of such a precise formulation. This is in part because he thought that redemption was near, and therefore there was no need to form a worldly messianic community. Second, the text assumes the death of Sevi and hence the second coming of the messiah. The most plausible explanation would be that when he was in exile, Sevi could have given some guidelines as to how to live during his absence, and those guidelines could have been the nucleus of the commandments. Regardless of who formulated them, they certainly were created with Sevi in mind, since he is the central figure in the text. The formulation seems to have been completed before the splits within the Sabbatean community because, to the best of our knowledge, the main principles and spirit of the commandments were shared and accepted by all the subsects. Over the years the commandments were revised by each subsect in accordance with their needs.

The number of original principles (Hebrew: סדרים; Spanish: *encommendancias*; Turkish: *Onsekiz Emir*) is eighteen. The number eighteen has significance in both Kabbala and Sufi traditions. Among the Mevlevi dervishes, it refers to the first eighteen verses of Mevlana Celalettin Rumi's magnum opus, *Mesnevi*, which also symbolically refers to the 18,000 terrestrial and celestial universes. In Jewish tradition, the number eighteen corresponds to the "Eighteen Benedictions"—the basic prayer of the daily Jewish liturgy. Eighteen also possesses the numerical value of the Hebrew word, *chai*, "life." And Sevi was considered to be the eighteenth messianic soul in a long line of prophets, starting with Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Ester.

Although there are some Jewish elements in the commandments, they have almost no Islamic flavor. Different versions of the text appeared in Hebrew, Ladino, and Turkish in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was the German-Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz who in 1884 published a German translation of the commandments for the first time.² He had obtained information about the Dönmes from a German traveler Carl Braun, who went to Salonica in 1876 and obtained the commandments from his French friend

² Graetz, "Überbleibsel der Sabbatianischen Sekte," 49–63.

who was acquainted with a Dönme. Both the French observer and the Dönme wished to remain anonymous. A few years after Graetz's publication, Theodore Bent visited Salonica and befriended several Dönme elders and other local people, obtaining more materials from them. Bent first published in English, and then in German, an extensive article on the Dönmes' customs and beliefs.³ The commandments that both Graetz and Bent published were similar in terms of content, but both sets are missing three commandments. They are, however, very different from the texts of Abraham Amarillo, Abraham Danon, and Abraham Galante, which clearly originated from the same source. This difference suggests that the two different sets of commandments may belong to two different sects. Let me first translate the Graetz text from German in its entirety and demonstrate its difference from the Bent text, and then compare them with the other texts:

1. God is One and Sabbatai is his Prophet. Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Ester and others are only parts of Sabbatai's soul. This way, the *maaminim* maintain that Sabbatai came to this world eighteen times under the names of Adam, Abraham, etc. The world is created for the *maaminim*. The Muslims have the purpose of protecting only this. From that the saying of *maaminim*: There is no egg without a shell. [Bent adds: the Turks are the shell (*qelippa*); the *maaminim* are the egg.]
2. The non-Israelites are *qelippas*.
3. A believer is not allowed to marry a *qelippa* or to a Jewess, until the Israelites recognize that Sabbatai is the Messiah.
4. Paradise is created for the *maaminim* and for the Israelites. [Bent: The *maaminim* have a share in the other world; the others have not.]
5. The souls of the *qelippas* sink to the lower world with the body. [Bent: The souls of egg-shells go down to Gehenna, but never ascend out of it again]
6. The Israelites are not *maaminim*, but they will one day arrive at the truth and will confess that Jacob, Moses, etc. are only sparks of Sabbatai's soul. [Bent adds: and then they themselves will become sparks of the Messiah.]
7. What concerns your rights, duties, and business, subject yourself to the Law of Moses!
8. Hate the Israelites not, for they will be your brothers shortly.
9. You will be punished if you speak of your religion to a *qelippa* or an Israeliite.
10. The Israelites will be inspired by the Creator (i.e., will be led on the right path); you are obliged not to show them the way to paradise. [Bent: God alone will show them the way to the other world.]
11. Your first duty is to simulate the quality of being Muslims, and to stay entirely Jewish in your innermost [world].
12. It is not a sin in the eyes of God to kill a *maamin* who reveals the secrets of his religion. Hate these traitors. Even kill him, if he is dangerous for the *maaminim*. [The second sentence is missing in Bent.]

³ Theodore Bent, "Peculiar People." Bent tells that he gathered his information from several Dönmes; Rabbi Nehemiah, a wealthy Jew who has made the Dönmes a special study; and a Greek priest.

13. The *maaminim* must obey the government of Islam. The Muslims will protect, even wage war for you. Always assert that you are of Islam. Defend Islam, simulate reading Qur'an, and performing *Namaz*, etc. But never take refuge in the Islamic court; on the contrary, the Law of Moses may serve as your law in all of your quarrels. You shall always have your Beth-Din. Remain obedient to the Muslims, do not seek to substitute them (?) [Bent adds: They are to be subject to the Turks, but they are in no way to abase themselves before them more than they can help.]
14. God forbids the *maaminim* from imbibing intoxicating drinks.
15. You shall have two names, one for the world, the other for paradise. [Bent: All *maaminim* must have two names, a Turkish one, for public; and a Jewish one, by which only you shall be known amongst yourselves.]
16. Bring the name of the Creator to mind twice every day!

It is not clear to which subsect this text, with its heavy Lurianic tone, belongs, or to which period. Bent, after dividing the Dönmes into three groups—the Izmirli, the orthodox followers of Sevi; the Jacobins, followers of Yakub Çelebi; and the followers of Osman Baba—states that “we concern ourselves only with the orthodox sect.” By “orthodox sect” he refers to the Kapancıs. But he does not tell us to which subsect this text belong. Karakaş?

The earliest known text at our disposal, dated to the 1760s, is in Hebrew. It was published by Amarillo in 1960 and translated into English by Scholem. Scholem rightly suggests that the text could belong to the Kapancı sect, since it does not possess any allusion to messianic figures other than Sevi, such as Yakub Çelebi or Osman Baba. But the same can be argued for the Graetz-Bent text. Therefore, these sets of principles could belong to one of the three subsects.

A Ladino text of the commandments was found and translated into French by Abraham Danon, a famous rabbi of Edirne, in 1889.⁴ A slightly different one was translated into French by the Turkish-Jewish scholar Abraham Galante in 1935, and a skewed summary of another set was published by Ebu'l Mecdet in 1924.⁵ Since the Amarillo text is the earliest available one, hence likely closer to the *urtext*, I quote it in full and show the differences between it and the Danon and Galante texts:⁶

In the name of Sabbatai Sevi.⁷ Here are the Eighteen Commandments of our Lord, King, and Messiah, Sabbatai Sevi, whose glory be exalted.

1. They shall be conscientious in the faith of Heaven, that He is one and only, and besides Him there is no god, and providence does not belong to any prince or rulers except Him.

⁴ Danon, “Une Secte Judeo-Musulmane en Turquie.”

⁵ Galante, *Nouveaux Documents sur Sabbatai Sevi*, 40–46. Ebu'l Mecdet, “Sabatayistlik,” 1–2.

⁶ I use Scholem’s translation with small variations. See his “The Sprouting of the Horn,” *In the time of Harvest: Essays in Honor of Abba Hillel Silver*, ed. D. Silver (London: Macmillan, 1963), 368–386.

⁷ Only the Danon text has this opening *besmele*. He rightly thinks that the formulation of “In the name of S.” is an imitation of “Bismillah, in the name of Allah.”

2. They shall believe in His Messiah, who is the True Redeemer and there is no other redeemer except Him, namely, our Master, our King, S[abbatai] C[Sevi], of the seeds of the House of David (of blessed memory).⁸
3. They shall not swear falsely by His Blessed Name or by His Messiah, for his Master's Name is in Him and they shall not profane it.
4. They shall honor His Blessed Name, and so also they honor the Name the Messiah of the when they make mention of it, and so also [shall each do] for any greater than he in wisdom.
5. They shall advance from strength to strength in recounting and disclosing subtleties in the mystic messianic faith, *Raza Demeshiha*; as also on the eighteenth day [other texts: sixteenth] of Kislev they shall all of them assemble together in one house, and there they shall recount to one other what they have heard and understood of the mythic faith in the Messiah, *raza di-Mehemanutha di-Meshiha*.⁹
6. There shall be among them no murderers, even [of those] among the Nation, even if they detest them.
7. There shall be among them no thieves.¹⁰
8. There shall be among them no adulterers. Although, this is [only] a commandment of the Created World [Beria]; because of the thieves it is necessary to be conscientious in observance.
9. They shall not bear false witness, nor shall they speak falsely to one another; and they shall not inform among themselves, even to [against] unbelievers.
10. They are not permitted to come [bring] in anyone under the turban, even one who believes intensely. For he who is of the Warriors will come in himself with a complete heart and a desiring spirit without any trace of coercion whatever.
11. There shall not be among them any that covet what is not theirs.
12. They shall keep the feast [other texts: the fast and the feast] in Kislev with great rejoicing. [Says the copyist: It is the feast of the miracle of “He brought me up also out of the tumultuous pit, out of the miry clay,” which is on the sixteenth of Kislev, as is known, this is the day on which he was plunged into the great ocean by Samael and was delivered, as is recounted on a previous page.]
13. They shall behave graciously toward one another, fulfilling His [each other's] desire.
14. They shall study privately the Book of Psalms, a daily measure every day.
15. Each and every month they shall look up and behold the birth of the moon and shall pray that the moon turn its face opposite the sun, face to face.

⁸ Danon claims that this part imitates the Islamic principle: “There is no God but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God.” He concludes that these analogies were sufficient to show the influence exercised by Vani Efendi on Sabbatai. See Danon, “Une Secte,” 273.

⁹ Both the Danon and Galante texts contain only the first part. The second part appears in article 7 in their texts without mention of the names of the books.

¹⁰ The Danon and Galante texts differ in article 7. “Everyone gets together on Kislev 16 and recounts the mysteries in believing the messiah to each other.” In other words, article 7 is a recap of article 5 in the Amarillo text.

16. They shall be conscientious in [their observance of] the precepts of the Ishmaelites, among whom they have to blind their eyes and eradicate his [their] seed. And as for the fast [of Ramadan], those that keep it shall not be concerned, and similarly about their sacrifices to the demons they shall not be concerned; and those things that are exposed to their [i.e., the Muslims'] view they shall observe.¹¹
17. They shall not intermarry with them [i.e., the Muslims], neither in their lifetime or in death, for they are an abomination and their women are creeping things, and concerning them it is said “Cursed be he that lies with any kind of beast.”¹²
18. They shall be conscientious to circumcise their sons and remove disgrace from upon the holy people.

For my desire is in these Eighteen Ordinances, although some of them belong [only] to the law of the Created World, for the Throne has not yet been made whole, until the vengeance of the Children of Israel is wrought upon Samael and his company. At that time all will be equal, [there shall be] no proscribed and no permitted, no polluted and no pure, for they shall all know them [me], from the least of them to the greatest of them. And caution the Comrades who are Believers but have not taken the turban—which is the war—that they must be conscientious in their observance of the law of the Created World [*Beria*] and Supernatural World [*Atzilut*], they must not omit anything until the time of Revelation. Thenceforward, they will be attired in the Tree of Life, and all will be equal.” May it be His will that He [Sevi] soon be revealed. Amen!

The Amarillo and Danon-Galante texts are nearly in agreement in the way they structure the commandments. But how can we explain the differences between the Graetz text and the Amarillo text? Could this be simply because of the differences among the subsects? Scholem thinks that in the nineteenth-century versions there was a tendency toward moderating the anti-Muslim tone. Examining the German texts, however, suggests the opposite. The text unequivocally recommends corporal punishment for transgressors of the principles. As discussed in the previous chapter, we know of several cases of physical and even capital punishment exercised by the communal authorities on transgressors. Paradoxically, the intolerant tone of the text could be a sign of more assimilation into Turkish society. The community leaders were losing ground to modernization and secularization, and this very fact made them increasingly intolerant toward those who were thinking of leaving the fold.

All these variant texts show that the main principles were unanimously accepted by the subsects, and hence the original text was produced before the

¹¹ The Danon text follows the Amarillo text in depicting the rule about the sacrifice. It is the first time the Galante text differs from the Danon text in a major way and skips the notion of the Turks sacrificing to the diabolical power.

¹² The Galante text softens the curse as follows: “we shall not incur any alliance with them (Muslims).” This change could be a reflection of the increasing intermarriage trend among the Dönmes at the turn of the twentieth century.

community was divided into three. The principles provided the community a shared framework and culture on which they could build their own subsects in subsequent decades. In time, the principles that were originally written in Hebrew were translated mainly into Ladino, Judeo-Spanish, and, in rare cases, Turkish in accordance with the interests of the subgroups. The subgroups that were more flexible about the question of assimilation revised the commandments in a more inclusive direction, more indulgent of both Jews and Muslims; the subgroups that were more rigid in observing communal rules revised them in a more exclusive and radical direction.

Another important observation about the texts is their allusions to the kabbalistic and messianic universe, where all of the Dönmes imagined themselves to be living. This universe is not the universe of a “new religion,” as portrayed by foreign observers and modern scholars,¹³ but as an extension of the post-messianic Jewish universe. In the classical Kabbala, this world is simply described as the Atzilut, or World of Emanation, which was the highest of four spiritual worlds (Assiah, Yetzirah, Beria, and Atzilut). According to this idea, the Torah of Atzilut replaces the Torah of the Beria and initiates the messianic age. However, there was one major issue that separated the Dönme universe from the traditional Jewish messianic imagination. They believed that the messiah had come but then disappeared from mortal eyes before bringing redemption. This forced the Dönmes to reinterpret the world of Atzilut and develop a theology of a second coming of the messiah. The Torah of Atzilut does not refer to an existing Sabbatean doctrine as taught by Sabbatai or Nathan but to a new concept fashioned by the later Dönmes.

According to this messianic theology, at least in the Karakaş context, the messiah had given them the glad tidings of the Messianic Age, and then put them to sleep for a time period until His incarnation would return in the guise of one of (a member of) the chosen four families—the Russos, Cohens, Florentins, and Girons.¹⁴ Until then, they had to put their “secret” to sleep and burden themselves with silence. The full and complete mystery, that is, the Torah of Atzilut, would be revealed only at the messiah’s second manifestation, and then it would be revealed not only to the elect few but to the whole world.

Contending that they were living in the transitional world, the Dönmes thought of themselves as living in the post-messianic; they followed antinomian principles, including transgressing Jewish laws, such as eating pork or profaning Shabbat, and engaging in illicit sex. In this universe, the Dönmes thought of the Jews as “chosen” and of themselves as the “chosen of the chosen” or “children of God.” All the variants of the commandments value the Jews (*koferim*-unbelievers) and the Jewish Sabbateans as ontological

¹³ See for example, Marc Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 12.

¹⁴ Communicated to me by a contemporary Dönme. The names of these families are repeated in the debates around the Karakaş Rüştü affair in 1924 as well (see Chapter 8).

comrades, holding out the hope that one day they will accept the truth. Until the *kofirim* will accept it, the redemption won't come. The *qelippa*, or non-Jews are of no concern, since "their souls sink to the lower world with the body." This perception brings them pride and even arrogance once in a while.

I think this socio-theological framework of the Eighteen Commandments was the most important element for sustaining the enigmatic Dönme identity over centuries. Creating such a constitutional framework and Dönme Kabbala are some of the major Dönme contributions to the history of Kabbala as well.

The Credo and Abolition of Ceremonial Law

While the Eighteen Commandments aim to organize the daily life of the believers, the Sabbatean credo organizes the "messianic" life of believers. Judging by its content, the text of the credo seems to have been composed after the death of Sevi and shared by all the communities. The articles of the credo have major commonalities with the pillars of the Jewish credo, as formulated by Moses Maimonides.

The only known text of the credo was provided by a Kapancı Dönme from Salonica, who came to settle in Izmir and submitted a few "secret" documents, including a prayer book, to the Hebrew University Library in 1935. As Scholem demonstrated, important changes were made to the Jewish faith in order to use every opportunity to express faith in Sevi as the messiah. Whichever the traditional prayers or psalms speak of God's commandments, the Dönme prayers speak merely of "belief."¹⁵ Living a double life as they did, it was impossible to observe their secret religion's commandments in public, and therefore they had to spiritualize them and abandon Jewish ceremonial law. Here is the Credo, contained in the prayer book:

1. I believe with perfect faith in the faith of the God of truth, the God of Israel who dwells in [the Sphere of] *Tiferet*, the "Glory of Israel," [and in] the three knots of faith, which are one.
2. I believe with perfect faith that Sabbatai Zevi is the true King Messiah.
3. I believe with perfect faith that the Torah, which was given through our teacher Moses, is the Torah of truth, as it is written: And this is the Torah that Moses placed before Israel, as ordered by God through Moses. It is a Tree of Life to them that hold fast to it and its supporters will be happy.
4. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah cannot be replaced and that there will be no other Torah; *only the commandments have been abolished*, but the Torah remains binding forever and to all eternities.
5. I believe with perfect faith that Sabbatai Sevi, may his majesty be exalted, is the true Messiah and that he will gather together the dispersed of Israel from the four corners of the earth.

¹⁵ Gershom Scholem, "Seder Tefilut ha-Dönme me-kat ha-Izmirim," in *Mehkarim u-Mekorot* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 1974), 370–422.

6. I believe with perfect faith in the resurrection of the dead that the dead shall live and shall arise from the dust of the earth.
7. I believe with perfect faith that the God of truth, the God of Israel, will send the rebuilt sanctuary from above down to us [on the earth] beneath, as it is said: Unless God builds the house, those that build it labor in vain. May our eyes see and our heart rejoice and our soul sing for joy, speedily in our days. Amen.
8. I believe with perfect faith that the God of truth, the God of Israel will reveal Himself in this [earthly] world [called] *tevel*, as it said: for they shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion. And it said: And the Glory of God will be revealed and all flesh shall see it, for the mouth of the Lord has promised it.
9. May it be pleasing before Thee, God of Truth, God of Israel who dwells in the “Glory of Israel,” in the three knots of faith which are one, to send us the just Messiah, our Redeemer Sabbatai Zevi, speedily and in our days. Amen.¹⁶

The author of the credo takes over the Dönme mystical theory regarding the “three knots of faith,” meaning the three manifestations of the Godhead in the hidden world of the ten *sefirot*. As I have gathered from oral sources, this philosophy is one of the central tenets of Dönme Kabbala. The idea originates from the Kabbala, more particularly from the *Sefer ha-Yetzira* that describes the creation as such: “He created His universe with three books, with text (*sefer*-22 letters), with number (*sefar*-10 numbers), and with uttering (*sippur*).”¹⁷

Language and Liturgy

In similar fashion to that of the Ottoman Jews, the daily and literary language of the Dönmes was Judeo-Spanish, and the liturgical language was Ladino (a combination of Spanish and Hebrew). Daily language was the first area in which the Dönmes—especially Dönme males, who were in the public arena all the time—were forced to comply with the outer society. By the nineteenth century, most of the Dönmes retained the knowledge of Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish but had also learned Turkish and European languages. By the end of the century, thanks to the new Dönme schools, they excelled in Turkish and became leading figures in Turkish language, literature, and journalism.

Nehama writes that the Bible, the Talmud, the commentaries of Rashi, and the Shulhan Arukh were all still present in the libraries of educated Dönmes in the early twentieth century. Ben Zwi claimed that Hebrew remained the essential liturgical language among the Dönmes, and at least a few Dönmes could read the original Zohar until the 1930s.¹⁸ Visiting Turkey several times after 1903 and meeting many Dönmes, he also maintained that the Dönme

¹⁶ I reproduce Scholem’s translation. See his “Crypto-Jews.”

¹⁷ Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah, The Book of Creation* (Boston: S. Weiser, 1997), 5, 19–20.

¹⁸ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 113.

culture “shrank beyond recognition,” and that their esoteric literature was lost after the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1924. Scholem asserted that the use of Hebrew among the Dönmes faded, and by the end of the nineteenth century their religious texts were increasingly rendered in a phonetic transcription corresponding to the sound values of Judeo-Spanish but using Hebrew characters.¹⁹ In 1932 an anonymous article in the *Jewish Daily* stated that the Dönme rabbis were still well versed in the Bible and knew the Zohar almost by heart, and they regarded “the Spanish Judean tongue” as sacred because it was the language of Sabbatai Sevi.²⁰ All of these sources agree that Hebrew and Ladino disappeared among the Dönmes before the mid-twentieth century. However, the knowledge of Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew is still known among a small group of scholarly Dönmes.²¹

Sabbatean prayer books, amulets, and communal regulations in Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish (and rarely Turkish) have been examined and published by scholars such as H. Graetz, T. Bent, A. Danon, S. Rosanes, I. Gövsa, and A. Galante since the end of the nineteenth century. New materials that made their way to Israel in the 1940s and 1950s boosted scholarship on Sabbateanism. Many prayer books, Kabbala tracts, notebooks, and letters from earlier periods were published by scholars such as G. Scholem, I. Tishbi, I. Ben-Zwi, I. Attias, R. Shatz, I. Molcho, R. Molcho, Z. Shazar, and M. Benayahu. These documents, belonging to different periods of the Dönme communities, are yet another testament showing that amid political, social, and intellectual challenges, their communal existence in their parallel worlds continued uninterrupted.

Most of the Dönme liturgical hymns and prayers were produced in Hebrew and Ladino, but after the early eighteenth century, the Turkish language and music infiltrated the Sabbatean liturgy. As seen in the Harvard Manuscript, Attias, and Amarillo collections that consist of Ladino and Turkish songs and hymns written in Hebrew characters, Turkish already had become part of the Sabbatean liturgy by the mid-eighteenth century. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Dervish Efendi’s commentary cites the original Hebrew text of the Bible and was written in normative Ladino, with some additional Hebrew and Turkish words. He, for example, refers to Sevi as *tsadik temel del mundo* (the righteous man [in Hebrew], the foundation [in Turkish] of the world [in Ladino]).²² Schaufler’s encounter with the Dönmes in the mid-nineteenth century and his communication with them in Turkish also confirms that the Dönmes even produced kabbalistic texts in Turkish.²³

¹⁹ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect,” 156.

²⁰ *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, December 2, 1932, 3.

²¹ Cengiz Sisman, “Konvenyamos Konvedrad: Language of Daily Life, Communal Regulations and Liturgies of the Ottoman and Turkish Sabbateans (Dönmes),” in *Judeo-Spanish in the Time of Clamoring Nationalisms*, ed. Mahir Shaul (Istanbul: Libra, 2013), 63–97.

²² Avayou, “The Religious Literature of the Judeo-Muslim Dönme.”

²³ Schaufler, “Shabbathai Zevi and His Followers,” 3–4.

Most of the liturgy was composed for communal worship and religious assemblies in the secret synagogues and private houses. As Ben Zwi hinted, it is clear from the eight prayers in Attias's book in which the word "amen" occurs twelve times, and the sixth prayer in which the phrase "the Lord is God" appears twenty-five times that these songs and hymns were chanted together in the meetings. Meetings were led by religious leaders known as *hucas* and singers/poets known as *paytanim*, who in some cases also composed the hymns they recited. Today, we know of the existence of almost 1,500 hymns and songs belonging to different periods of the Dönmes, and most of them are yet to be published.²⁴ Kapancı Bitek told me that they used to meet in a house called Orta Evi, surrounded by big walls and maintained by an elderly couple, and sang songs and hymns, including the famous "Meliselda"²⁵ that Sabbatai Sevi loved so much, as well as the following ones:

Cennetin Kapısı,	(The gate of paradise)
Cevahirdir yapısı	(Made out of precious stones)
Yosef Aşar kapısı,	(That will be opened by Joseph)
Konvenyamos konverdad	(Hey, let us come together around the truth) ²⁶
Başımın tacı Sabetay	(Sabbatai, the crown of my head)
hey başım tacı Sabetay	(Oh, Sabbatai, the crown of my head)
Direk mumları	(Rows of mighty candles)
Görecegiz onları	(These we will see)
Kim görürse onları	(Whoever sees them)
Görecektil Allah'ı hey	(Will see God)
Refrain	
Gün olsa biz de görsek	(Wish to attain the day to see)
Efendimizi görsek	(Wish to see our Lord)
Muradımıza ersek	(Wish to realize our desire)
Refrain	
Klipalar ölecek	(The qelippot will perish)
Dünya bize kalacak	(The world will be ours)
David'ler oynayacak	(The Davids will dance and celebrate)
Refrain. ²⁷	

Devotional songs and liturgies could not be imagined without music. I was not surprised when I heard that one of the most important Sabbatean prayer

²⁴ Abraham Elqayam and Shlomo Avayou are preparing the following Sabbatean manuscripts for publication: MS Ben-Zwi Institute # 2271, 2272, and 2273; and MS Harvard University # 80.

²⁵ It is a well-known medieval Spanish *romanza*, "Meliselda, the Daughter of the Emperor." Inspired by the *Song of the Songs*, it is a longing for unity with Shekhina.

²⁶ I am grateful to Moshe Saul who helped me translate this puzzling construct. The alternative would be, he thinks, "we accept the truth."

²⁷ For an interpretation of this hymn, see Abraham Elqayam, "Basimin Tacı Shabbatai" [Hebrew], *Kabbalah* (2002): 225–235.

phrases was sung to a widely known melody of a religious chant, *takbir*, written by the famous seventeenth-century Turkish composer Itri (1640–1711). Instead of “Allahu Ekber Allahu Ekber La ilahu illallah u Allah u Ekber,” the Sabbatean prayer goes with the same melody as “Sabbatai Sevi Sabatay Sevi esparamos a ti/Sabatay Sevi Sabatay Sevi no es un otro como a ti.”²⁸ This was also not so surprising, since it was a well-established Ottoman Jewish musical tradition to adopt Turkish melodies for their Hebrew or Ladino songs.²⁹ The Dönmes simply continued this tradition.³⁰ In short, Turkish language and music became part of the Dönme liturgy, but Hebrew and Ladino remained the principal liturgical languages. As for daily language, Turkish had begun to replace Judeo-Spanish for the majority of the Dönmes by the end of the nineteenth century. A similar pattern could be detected among the other crypto-communities in the empire as well. In the Dönme case, however, a knowledge of Judeo-Spanish survived among the believers, at least on the levels of vocabulary, phrasing, and music. According to the testimony of a contemporary Dönme, they deliberately prioritized Ladino or other languages over Hebrew in time, because Satan (Samael) knows Hebrew only and cannot understand others. By using other languages, they were able to hide the “secrets” from Satan. Had Satan knew them, he could have prevented the Dönmes from their cosmic struggle to mend the universe. This kabbalistic interpretation explains in part why Hebrew lost its vitality among the Dönmes. This could also be understood as their justification for abandoning Hebrew in their daily and liturgical lives over time.

Religious Calendar and Festivals

Calendars and festivals are necessary for religious groups, and for crypto-groups in particular, to reenact the significant events in their history, to renew their worldly and spiritual time, and to perpetuate their existence. As Carlebach demonstrates, the calendars are living systems, constantly modified as new preoccupations emerge and old priorities fade. They serve to structure time and activities, and thus become mirrors of experience.³¹

The Dönme calendars mark revised Jewish festivals and special Dönme commemorative moments, revolving around events in the life of their messiah, the founders of the subsects, and communal leaders from later centuries. Similar to the Jewish luni-solar calendar, the rhythm of Dönme time is determined both by the sun and by the moon. Some of those festivals were

²⁸ Personal communication with Haluk Bitek.

²⁹ Andreas Tietze and Joseph Yahalom, *Ottoman Melodies and Hebrew Hymns: A 16th Century Cross-Cultural Adventure* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1995).

³⁰ Edwin Seroussi, “A Piyut by Israel Najara Sung by the Sabbateans.”

³¹ Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

already established at the time of Sevi; others were “invented” and added to the evolving Dönme calendar in later centuries. The Dönme also had to celebrate the Islamic high holidays such as Ramadan and the Festival of Sacrifice, and they had to attend Friday prayers, which were an obligatory religious practice for every Muslim male.

A list of Dönme festivals and their interpretations was first published by Danon in 1897. Solomon Rosanes added a few more festivals to the list, especially ones linked to the Jewish tradition. We learned about other festivals during the Karakaş affair in the 1920s (see Chapter 8). And finally, Galante published a longer list in 1935. With the help of a contemporary Karakaş calendar from the 1990s, here I attempt to establish a more comprehensive list of the Dönme festivals.

The Sabbatean calendar, according to Danon’s list, begins with the rebirth of the messiah in May/Sivan, and ends with the circumcision of the messiah in March–April/Adar.³² The contemporary calendar begins with Rosh Ha-Shana in October/Tishrei and ends with Atarat Ne’adarim in September/Elul. In between, there are almost forty festivals and commemorative dates that make up the rich Karakaş Dönme religious life—but most of those festivals were celebrated by other subsects as well. Below is Danon’s list, with Galante’s interpretations in the footnotes:

1. **14 Sivan (Moed Tzemach [The Festival of Growth]):** Symbolizes the rebirth of nature in spring. It represents the Talmudic prophet Tzemach’s ascension to the highest level.
2. **21 Sivan (Anointment of [the Messiah] by Eli):** Marks the beginning of Sabbatai Sevi’s messianic call.
3. **24 Sivan:**³³ Might be related to Raphael Joseph Çelebi.
4. **9 Tammuz (Beginning of the Clothing of Soul):** Commemorates the time when Sabbatai was clothed with a Holy Spirit (Ruah ha-Kodesh).
5. **17 Tammuz (The Day of His Conception):** A festival invented when Sevi was in prison in the Dardanelles.
6. **23 Tammuz (The Festival of Illumination):** Marks the time when Sevi sent a letter to the Jewish communities in order to abolish the fast of Tisha be-Av.
7. **24 Temmuz (Samedi Saint/ Shabbat Kodesh):** The traditional Jewish Great Shabbat, transformed by Sevi into Samedi Shabbat.³⁴
8. **3 Av (Beginning of the Coronation of Glory):** Refers to the time when Sevi was in Cairo with Raphael Çelebi.³⁵

³² Danon, “Une Secte Judeo-Musulmane en Turquie.”

³³ Galante dates those festivals on 24 Sivan and 26 Sivan instead of 21 and 24.

³⁴ To Galante, Sevi dedicated this festival to his wife, Sarah.

³⁵ To Galante, it is related to the discussion between Sevi and Nehemia Cohen in the castle on Dardanelles.

9. 9 Av (The Festival of Rejoicing and the Birthday of the Messiah): One of the earlier festivals established by Sevi (festival of Tisha be-Av). It is also one of the most antinomian ones. Traditionally, this day commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples, and hence was a day of mourning. Sevi turned it into a day of rejoicing because it was his birthday.

10. 15 Av (The Day He Was Salted): The word *nimlach* written with the letter “huf” at the end refers to the coronation of Sevi as the king. Hence, this date could also refer to the Coronation of the Messiah.

11. 16 Kislev (Purim): The date of Sevi’s conversion to Islam.³⁶

12. 21 Adar (The Day of the King): Refers to Sevi’s birth.

13. 28 Adar (The Day of His Circumcision): Jewish custom has boys circumcised on the eighth day, and this day refers to the Circumcision of the Messiah.

Danon, interestingly enough, does not include Kuzu Bayramı (the Lamb Festival) to his list. Rosanes, who was mostly acquainted with the Kapancıs in Salonica, added four more festivals to Danon’s list, including the Lamb Festival.³⁷

14. 16 Tevet: A traditional Jewish fast day turned into a feast.

15. 15 Shevat: A traditional Jewish holiday Tu be-Shvat celebrating trees.

16. 15 Adar (Purim): A traditional Jewish holiday.

17. 22 Adar (the Lamb Festival).

The Lamb Festival is the most controversial and most antinomian one among the Dönme festivals. While the Karakaş refer to the festival as Dört Gönül Bayramı (Festival of Four Souls), the Kapancıs refer to it as the “Lamb Festival” and the Yakubis call it the Bahar Bayramı (Spring Festival). The most common description of the festival, based on several historical and contemporary accounts, is as follows: On the night of 22 Adar (sometime in mid-March) the couples gather and perform a series of rituals in a ceremonial manner. The most important meal at the dinner table is the seasonal lamb that was carefully chosen in accordance with certain symbolic requirements. Before that day, believers were supposed to refrain from eating mutton. The dinner is accompanied by songs, hymns, prayers, and drinks. At the end of the night, according to the most widely circulated rumors, they extinguish the lights and randomly swap partners. Babies who were conceived on that night were believed to be holy and would-be messiahs. Ben Zwi further elaborates on the scene:

The candles are put out in the course of the dinner which is attended by orgies and the ceremony of the exchange of wives. There is reason to believe that this ceremony has not been entirely abandoned and continues to this day

³⁶ To Galante, the Fifth Commandment refers to 16 Kislev, where the believers were supposed to “assemble together in one house, and recount to one other what they have heard and understood of the mythic faith of the Messiah.” The date also refers to Sevi’s struggles with Samael, the Dragon at the Sea.

³⁷ Rosanes, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael*, IV: 471.

(1940s), particularly among the Karakaş and the Capanajis. One of their elders, known among the members of his own community by the Jewish name Samuel Assael, has explained that the members of this sect were instructed by their leader in the doctrine of the communal holding of wives, and have so acted for 60 years, adding that there was communal holding of property as well as of wives. They held to this custom until the days of Sultan Abdulaziz (1860s).³⁸

A 1919 Turkish source, most probably penned by an apologetic Dönme, claims that the Dönmes used to celebrate this festival on the “first day of summer and candle extinguishing,” the evening of March 21.³⁹ Galante gives even more details:

Two or more couples attend the ceremony; the ladies in their best garments and jewelry serve a meal of mutton to the diners. After dinner, the candle, are extinguished, and the husbands exchange wives. It is believed that children born of such unions are regarded as saintly.⁴⁰

This sexual anarchy or “redemption through sin” in Scholemian terms, ironically signifies rebirth and purification in the spring. The following song was meant to be sung over the dinner and signifies that through eating the “holy flesh of lamb,” which was identified with Sevi, one became part of the holy community. This is somewhat similar to the Christian rite of celebrating the Eucharist by partaking of the consecrated bread and wine and thus being united with Christ’s body.

Lamb, lamb, we have eaten lamb.
This is the flesh of holiness
The Mystery of the lamb
In thee shall all the Israel be blessed
Lamb has come to us.⁴¹

For centuries, both Jews and Muslims disseminated wild rumors about the festival and the practices it entailed, the repercussions of which can still be heard today. As attested to by several Dönme testimonies and textual evidence, however, these rumors seem to have some factual basis. The historical origin of this antinomian act is not clear. Galante thinks that the origin of the “extinguishing of the candles” goes back to oriental mythologies of antiquity. The residue of this tradition was transmitted to Near Eastern religions and cultures. And Oriental Jewry were “tainted” by this residue.⁴² As a response

³⁸ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 312–313.

³⁹ Binbaşı Sadık, *Dönmeliğin Hakikati* (İstanbul:n.p. 1919). See also Chapter 8.

⁴⁰ Galante, *Nouveaux Documents*, 52.

⁴¹ Cited in Elqayam, “Sabbatean Cookery: Food, Memory and Feminine Identity in Modern Turkey,” *Kabbalah* 14 (2006): 41.

to Gordlevsky, who argues that the Dönmes brought antinomian concepts to Salonica (especially the orgiastic rituals of the “extinguishing of the candles” from underground circles in oriental Jewry), Scholem claims that antinomian behaviors were not unique to the kabbalistic tradition. He writes that every acute and radical messianistic belief tears open an abyss where antinomian tendencies and libertine moral concepts inevitably gain strength.

The Sabbatean theology was conducive for antinomian sexual tendencies from the beginning. One of the Eighteen Commandments deals with the prohibition of fornication, but it is formulated in an ambiguous fashion, since the sexual prohibitions belonged to the world of *Beria*. In the early songs and hymns, there are implicit and explicit references to the festival, such as symbols of “eating,” “the table,” “the opening of the rose,” “providing” and “lending.”⁴³

In the beginning the rite was practiced on the evening of the traditional commemoration of Sevi’s birthday in the spring, but we are not sure whether it was originally associated with sexuality or even if it was practiced by all the groups. Cardozo, for example, accused Yakub Çelebi of sleeping with his follower’s wives.⁴⁴ A similar allegation was leveled against Sevi and then against Osman Baba in their times. A pamphlet circulated by the rabbinate of Constantinople in 1714 has the same allegation.⁴⁵ Joseph Ergas refers to the antinomian behavior of wife-swapping as early as in 1715.⁴⁶ We know that Osman Baba and his successors declared the Torah prohibition on incest abolished, since all prohibitions were changed to be positive commandments. Scholem speculates that some of the Dönmes were of the opinion that as long as incest taboos are in force here on earth “it is impossible to perform the unifications above.” In the mystical suspension of the prohibition on incest, man will become “like unto his Creator in the mystery of the Tree of Life.”⁴⁷

As discussed before, Jacob Frank and Dervish Efendi radicalized this sexual antinomianism and institutionalized it once a year. In Dervish Efendi’s homilies, formulas such as “Freedom is the secret of the spiritual Torah,” and “Soldiers are released from the Commandments” clearly refer to these antinomian practices. Ben Zwi asserts that Dervish Efendi’s attempt at communalizing

⁴² Galante, *Nouveaux Documents*, 53. For the existence of this practice among the Armenians and some Eastern cultures, see James Russel, “The Word Chragamah and the Rites of the Armenian Goddess,” *Journal of Armenian Studies* 5 (1990–1991): 157–172; for another example from eastern Turkey, see Robert Dankoff, “Unpublished Account of Mum Söndürmek in the Seyehatname of Evla Çelebi,” in *Bektachiyya-Etudes*, ed. A. Popovic and G. Veinstein (Istanbul: Isis, 1995), 69–73. Since the nineteenth century, there have been persistent rumors that the practice of “extinguishing of the candles” continues in the Alevi and Yezidi communities.

⁴³ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect,” 164.

⁴⁴ Cardozo, *Selected Writings*, 88.

⁴⁵ Emden, *Torat ha-Kenaot*, 64.

⁴⁶ Cited in Rosanes, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael*, IV: 464.

⁴⁷ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 810–811.

possessions and wives ultimately proved abortive, and collective marriage did not become part of the Sabbateans' social code; but as late as the 1940s, the effects of his doctrine were still very much alive among members of his sect, who on religious pretexts indulged in orgies. However, he does not specify which Dönme branch was practicing it. Ben Zwi's informant, Dr. Ismail Eden (Samuel Assael), a Karakaş himself, who traced his family tree to the disciples of Dervish Efendi, told him that his grandfather had participated in the wife-swapping ceremony.⁴⁸

Having heard all these allegations, the Jews accused the Dönmes of practicing ritual fornication and free love. Emphasizing that these illicit sexual activities were *halakhically* forbidden, most rabbis refused to work with the Dönmes, claiming that they were likely to be bastards (*mamzerim*).⁴⁹ Therefore, it was forbidden to keep them in the congregation, to marry them, and also to marry their children, since in Judaism the children of illegitimate progeny were also considered illegitimate. When the Dönmes wanted to return to Judaism in large numbers before the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1924, the rabbis relied on this same reasoning to refuse them permission.

There are other accounts of the Lamb Festival that come from Turkish and Dönme sources, supporting allegations that it continued. For example, Ahmed Safi relates that once a young man of Salonica accidentally saw about fifteen people having sex and drinking in one of the Dönme houses in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁰ A Karakaş woman by the name of Meziyet Hanım claims that in 1925 she was forced to participate in one of those parties. Another young Kapancı man related that the practice continued in the nineteenth century and exclusively involved married couples:

Until recently the Dönmes could not eat lamb meat before celebrating the Lamb Festival. On that specific night, which falls in spring, they boil the blessed lamb meat, and meanwhile they perform prayer. A piece of cooked lamb was sent to each Dönme family, and only after that, they could buy lamb meat from the butcher. On that night, there were many other prayers as well. Bachelors could not be admitted to the gathering, which was reserved for married couples only. The reason for not admitting the bachelors was most likely to avoid their taking advantage of another's wife without providing theirs in return when the lights were out. However much I investigated the nature of the meetings, I was told nothing but that I could learn about it when I was married.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ben Zwi's Introduction to Attias's *Shirim ve Tishbahot*.

⁴⁹ A *mamzer* is the child of a couple whose sexual relationship is forbidden according to the Torah and punishable by *karet* or death. There are twofold consequences of this status: 1-A marriage between a *mamzer* (male or female) and a legitimate Jew or Jewess is prohibited; 2-The offspring of a *mamzer* (whether male or female) and a legitimate Jew or Jewess are also *mamzerim*. See A. Benjamin, "Mamzer," in *Judaica*, online version.

⁵⁰ Ahmed Safi, *Dönmeleler Adeti*, 71–73.

⁵¹ Cengiz Sisman, "The Dönme Affair: A Letter of a Young Donme from Salonica on Assimilation (1925)," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. P. Mendes and J. Reinharz, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 829–833.

Gövsa is also of the opinion that this practice existed.⁵² Based on these available sources, it is plausible to think that a form of Lamb Festival associated with sexual practices was celebrated in various forms by every Sabbatean subgroup since the early days. But it was the Karakaş circle that radicalized the practice and continued it into the twentieth century, even perhaps until today.⁵³ From the oral sources, however, we learn that this practice was not approved of by the majority members of the Kapancı and Karakaş groups.

Karakaş Rüştü corroborates that the most important and the most blessed of those holidays in the eyes of the Dönmes is the Lamb Festival, which is celebrated on the 22nd of Adar.⁵⁴ He also made some additions to the list of the existing Sabbatean Festivals, with his own explanations. Except for one, he does not date those festivals:

18. 27 Adar: This is a celebration in the memory of Osman Baba and his thirteen companions. It is the most ostentatious holiday. The most famous cooks prepare borekas, other delicacies and desserts for the sumptuous tables. On that night, the community gathers around the tables, which are decorated with flowers, and prays for the soul of Osman Baba.

19. Meyve Bayramı (The Festival of Fruit): A big round tray is brought, covered with fruit. The believers sit around the tray with a handkerchief in hand. And they wait for the “blessed” fruits to be distributed to them.

20. Haman Bayramı (The Festival of Haman): Purim.

21. Jozef Bayramı (The Festival of Joseph): Hanukkah.

22. Ağaç Bayramı (The Festival of Trees): The trees get watered, and meanwhile, blessing prayers are performed.⁵⁵

23. Tan Bayramı (The Festival of Dawn): Families get up early and participate in ceremonies in their special prayer houses. They also contribute to the charity box, whose money is distributed among the poor.

24. Af Bayramı (The Festival of Forgiveness): In that particular day, the Sabbateans wear yellow shoes and cloaks. They prostrate themselves before the soul of Osman Agha, and ask for forgiveness of their sins.

Another list of festivals is presented by the aforementioned young Kapancı man in his letter. The author asserts that he does not want to go into detail except for the Lamb Festival, saying that the rest of the festivals were based

⁵² Gövsa, *Sabatay Sevi*, 97.

⁵³ For another Kapancı version of the celebration which does not contain sexual content, see Ilgaz Zorlu, “Çok Merak Edilen bir Sabetacı Ritüeli: Mum Söndü,” in his *Evet Ben Selanikliyim* (İstanbul: Zwi, 1998), 63.

⁵⁴ Interview with Rüştü, *Vakit*, January 17, 1924.

⁵⁵ Boaz Huss indicated that a poem in the Dönme Seder of *Tu be-Shvat*, found in *Shirot ve Tishbahot*, is similar to the poem in *Hemdat Yamim*. I am grateful to Boaz who drew my attention to this similarity.

on “absurd” traditions. Like Rüştü, unfortunately, he also did not assign any date to them:

25. **Hinali Baluk**⁵⁶
26. **Purim**: Purim
27. **Kipir**: Yom Kippur
28. **Misheberakh**⁵⁷
29. **Taanit**: Fasting
30. **Lamb Festival**

With some contradictions and repetitions, the festival lists seem to complement each other, but they are not exhaustive by any means. A contemporary two-page Karakaş calendar from the late 1990s that was placed at my disposal provides us with the complete list of Dönme festivals and commemoration days, and sets the record straight, at least for the Karakaş, for the first time. The existence of updated religious calendars is one of the surest signs of a functioning community. The fact that contemporary practicing Dönmes still keep up the tradition would easily disprove the argument for the non-existence of orthodox Dönme believers in present time. Needless to say, this calendar has been constantly modified in accordance with the Karakaş experience over time. In that regard, it would be interesting to have a calendar from another group or another period to track possible omissions and additions.

Saban’s interview with a contemporary Dönme confirms that some of the Karakaş continue to observe those festivals mentioned in the calendar:

... similar to *Yom Kippur*, sometimes in January, we fast all day long, and then eat *borekitas*. We celebrate Purim and eat *Capeta* [a dessert with sesame]. In our funerals, we recite the *kaddish* prayer in the musical tune of *Tekbir*. As a sign of mourning, like Jews, we light a candle every morning for seven days, and make some special prayers. We perform all our festivals, circumcision ceremonies, and weddings in the *Orta Evi*. Osman Baba’s wax sculpture is placed there. There we also celebrate the Lamb Festival. *Yakubis* no longer celebrate this festival. *Kapancis* come and get a piece of lamb and take it home to eat there. *Karakaş* celebrate it in a different manner.⁵⁸

As demonstrated in the following comparative table, the contemporary calendar contains almost all of the aforementioned festivals in addition to special

⁵⁶ In Ladino, *cuna* means cradle. It was believed that Sevi put a fish into a cradle and said that emancipation was going to come under the Zodiac sign of Pisces, the fish. Galante thinks that this festival originates from this Sabbatean belief, and Hinali Baluk is a corrupted pronunciation of *Cunali Balik*.

⁵⁷ This particular phrase is contained in a special eulogy to Sevi, recited in a ceremony. The eulogy in Ladino starts, “Bless our Signor, King, Saint, the Just, Sabbatai Sevi, the Messiah of the God of Jacob.”

⁵⁸ Giacomo Saban, “Residui Di Tradizioni Sabbatiane Ancore Presenti in Turchia,” *Annuario Del Collegio Rabbinico Italiano*, 3 (1988–1991): 117–131. I am grateful to Giacomo who confirmed this with me personally.

days dedicated to the important communal leaders and the companions of Osman Baba. Who are these companions, also called the “Thirteen Babas or Çelebis?” Yalman and then Rüştü argue that these thirteen people were the first who pledged allegiance to Osman Baba.⁵⁹ Their descendants still take pride in their lineage, so much so that on their tombstones they refer to their Çelebi ancestors (see the section on cemeteries later in the chapter). Karakaş Rüştü reported that the Dönmes included important families such as the Russos, Florentis, Girons, Levis, and Cohens. The holiest bloodlines were those of the Russos and the Cohens. Rüştü’s account also confirms the contemporary Karakaş account that claims Sevi will return in the body of one of these important family members. He relates another Dönme belief that only the Dönmes will rise from the dead on the day of the apocalypse. They will then assemble according to their bloodlines. The Cohens with the green banner, the rest with red and white banners, will enter paradise.⁶⁰

The calendar contains several other commemorative dates dedicated to certain male and female figures such as Ismail Çelebi, Ibrahim Çelebi, Süleyman Çelebi, Rivka Sultan, Bat Sheva Sultan, Rib'i Shimon Devletli, and Senior Nagid Sultan. The existence of women among these names endorses once again the central role of women in the Dönme tradition. Similar to Hilda Nissimi’s findings in her analysis of the Mashadis, or Renee Melammed’s in her analysis of Marrano women, Dönme women were not only promoters and reinforcers of the social bonds within the community but also safe-keepers of their hidden identities (see introduction).

Apart from the annual religious observances, there were also other customs that gave meaning to the Dönme existence. For example, the Yakubis used to go to the seaside early in the morning and make the supplication of “Sabbatai Sevi, esparamos ati.” Ben-Zwi gives another version wherein men and women go to the beach and call aloud “for thee we wait,” but they are referring to Yakub Çelebi, not Sevi.⁶¹ Another custom is for believers to recite a prayer when they see the new moon, and to pray that the moon will turn its face toward the sun: “O God, I see the Moon, O God I believe. Let the moon be blessed by God.” The contemporary calendar indicates that the new moon is still celebrated every month.

Needless to say, more research needs to be done in order to establish the dates conclusively, explain the festivals indubitably, and assign them to the appropriate subsects. Based on the lists prepared by Danon, Rosanes, Rüştü, A Young Dönme, Galante, and a contemporary Karakaş, Table 6.1 (D:Danon, R:Rosanes, K: Karakaş Rüştü, Y: Young Man, G:Galante, C:Contemporary) gives us a broader picture of the Dönme festivals vis-à-vis the Jewish calendar and holidays, and the Gregorian calendar. The dates are given next to the

⁵⁹ Yalman, “Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfasi,” January 12, 1924.

⁶⁰ An interview with Karakaş Rüştü, *Akşam*, January 17, 1924.

⁶¹ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and Redeemed*, fn 34. For this tradition also see Chapter 6 on “tradition.”

TABLE 6.1 A Comparative Chart of Jewish and Dönme Festivals

JEWISH CALENDAR	GREGORIAN CALENDAR	JEWISH HOLIDAYS	DÖNME HOLIDAYS
Tishrei	September–October	Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur Sukkot Shmini Atzeret Simchat Torah Gedaliah	1—Rosh Hashana (C) 2—Taksalar (C) 3—Gedalya (C) 10—Yom Kippur (C, Y) 12—Commemoration of İbrahim Çelebi (C)
Cheshvan	October–November		2—Dilburim Santos (C)
Kislev	November–December	Hanukkah	15—Taanit de Ora (C) 16—Purim (C,D,G,Y) 17—Se'udah (C) 22—Maasei Merkavah (C) 28—Commemoration of Rivka Sultan (C)
Tevet	December–January	Tenth of Tevet	10—Asara be-Tevet (C) 16—Feast Day (G,R) 26—Purim (C) 27—Se'udah (C) 28—Commemoration of Ismail Çelebi (C)
Shevat	January–February	Tu be-Shvat	15—Holiday Feast (G,R) 15—Rosh ha-Shanah Leila (C)
Adar I (and II)	March–April	Taanit Fest of Ester Purim	14—Ester-Aman Maase (C) 15—Purim (C,R,Y) 21—The Day of the King (D,G) 21—Purim (C) 22—Se'udah (C) 22—Lamb Festival (G,K,R,Y) 26—Commemoration of Bat Sheva Sultan (C) 27—Festival for Osman Baba and His Thirteen Companions (C,G,R) 28—The Day of His Circumcision (D,G)
Nissan	March–April	Passover	15—Mısır Maase I (C) 21—Mısır Maase II (C)
Iyar	April–May	Second Passover Lag be-Omer	17—Commemoration of Rib'i Shimon Devletli (C)

continued

TABLE 6.1 (continued)

JEWISH CALENDAR	GREGORIAN CALENDAR	JEWISH HOLIDAYS	DÖNME HOLIDAYS
Sivan	May–June	Shavuot	6—Shavuot (C) 14—Festival of Growth (D,G) 17—Ermuyenso (C) 21—Anointment of Messiah (D,G) 21—Se Unto Ad (C) 22—Nasimento (Osman Baba's Birthday) (C) 24—“He Gives Him Them” (D,G) 29—Brit Mila (C)
Tammuz	June–July	Seventeenth of Tammuz	9—The Clothing of Soul (C,D,G) 17—The Messiah's Conception (D,G) 19—Enkuvrimiento (C) 23—Hag Amerot (Festival of Illumination) (C,D,G) 24—Samedi Saint (Shabbat Kodesh) (C,D,G)
Av	July–August	Tisha be-Av Tu be-Av	3—The Coronation of Glory (C,D,G) 9—The Messiah's Birthday (D,G) 9—Misheberakh (The Birth of Adeniu Sultan) (C,Y) 15—The Day Messiah Is Salted (D,G) 15—Brit Mila (C) 27—Commemoration of Süleyman Çelebi (C)
Elul	August–September		07—Commemoration of Senior Nagid Sultan (C) 29—Atarat Nedarim (C)
Dates not specified by authors			The Festival of Dawn (K) The Festival of Fruit (K) The Festival of Forgiveness (K) Hanukkah (K) Hinali Baluk (Y)

Key: D: Danon, R: Rosanes, K: Karakas Rüştü, Y: Young Man, G: Galante, C: Contemporary

names of the holidays. Apparently, the Dönmes had a very busy religious calendar for their observant believers, who, it seems, engaged in a very intense communal life in their parallel universe. Every year, these events, as Mircea Eliade would say, are reenacted and cosmic time is renewed. In other words, the Dönme time was imagined to revolve around these cosmic events until the advent of the messianic times. We also have to remember that at least some

of the Dönmes had to celebrate regular Islamic high holidays, which makes them even busier in their material and spiritual worlds.

Crypto-Self-Government and Its Institutions

Not only festivals and rituals but also institutions are essential for sustaining a community. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of institutionalization, a process that helped to differentiate the Dönmes from individual crypto-Jews and Marranos who could not develop an organized communal life. Similar to Mashadis in Iran, the Dönmes preserved some of the old Jewish social and economic institutions as well as creating new ones, something that gave rise to the formation of a secret self-government. Secular and religious institutions such as administrative committees, schools, courts, worship houses, and charities were fashioned and refashioned over the centuries, depending on the new cultural and political environment. Here too, the institutionalization of subsects followed different evolutionary trajectories. Given that the Dönmes were very careful not to disclose their beliefs and practices to the outer world, detailed knowledge about their self-government remained hidden from curious eyes until the nineteenth century. As far as public ceremonies such as marriages and death are concerned, they outwardly conformed to those in usage among the Turks.

Birth, Circumcision, Genealogy, and Marriage

In a crypto-community where religion and community could not be separated, everything related to the life cycle had to be classified in such a way that the integrity of the community remained intact.

Most of the time, babies were named after their grandparents. In accordance with the Eighteen Commandments, they assumed two names: a Turkish one for this world, and a Jewish one for use within the community and in the next world. This double-naming was a practice of other crypto-communities in the empire as well. As Mazower indicates, having multiple names, in the crypto-contexts, served as a weapon of the weak against the strong.⁶² But in the Dönme context, it meant more.

Based on the family trees that I have been able to examine, there did not seem to be any general naming pattern among the Dönmes. Some families were, however, careful in choosing names and last names, often in allusion to messianic parables. “Osman” is one of the most frequently used first or second name in Karakaş circles, for example. According to the testimony of a contemporary Dönme, what was important was not to have a second name, but to have a Dönme family name, since it is believed that they will be classified according to their family names in the messianic age.

⁶² Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 63–65.

If a baby boy was born, he was to be circumcised at an early age by a specialized Jewish doctor, *mohel*, with a ceremony of special prayers. Rüştü, in the 1920s, stated that boys were circumcised at the age of two or three. This is still the case. The circumcision ceremony is undisputedly one of the most important symbolic events, covenants, and rites of passage in Dönme life, as prescribed in one of the Eighteen Commandments. To fulfill certain religious requirements, for example, the father is supposed to recite special prayers and perform the “second stitch” during the operation.

Children received their early education at home, and then at schools. The brighter children received special education, studying Hebrew and Ladino, with the hope of vying for the religious leadership of the community in the future. They are the ones who transmit the linguistic knowledge over generations. When they were thirteen, some of the communal secrets were revealed to all children, and the rest were revealed when they married.

As the Eighteen Commandments prescribe, the traditional Dönmes were only allowed to marry members of their subsect, not Muslims, Jews, or even other Dönmes. In some instances, parents would arrange marriages for babies still in their cradles (*beşik kertmesi*) to make sure that they married their own kind. Several practical reasons enforced endogamy among the Dönmes. Keeping “the secret” and “wealth” within the family are perhaps the most important ones. This rationale is one of the essential characteristics of all minorities and crypto-faith communities; due to these marriages, almost all of the families became close or distant relatives over a few centuries, and that is exactly what happened to the Dönmes.

To guarantee that no one married outside the sect, the Dönmes imposed material and spiritual measures against the “transgressors.” For example, the believers were told that every Dönme carried the light of Shekhina, called also as *Neshema*, and the moment she or he married an outsider, that *Neshema* would disappear, and the transgressor would grow dark (*kararmış*). According to a Karakas tradition, Moses gathered seventy souls on Mt. Sinai and placed them into the believers’ bodies. When they married outside the sect, they lost those souls. Sometimes extreme measures, including corporal punishment, would be taken to keep marriages within the group. The following tragic love story between a Yakubi girl, Rabia, and a Muslim boy, Hacı Feyzullah, documented in the Ottoman archive in 1891, demonstrates the severity of the Dönmes on this issue.⁶³ Despite the opposition of her father, Şeşbezزادe Osman, Rabia “converted” to Islam and escaped to her Muslim lover with the approval of the Ottoman authorities. Similar to other crypto-cases discussed in the previous chapter, the Ottomans recognized the Dönmes as a separate group, and the document, without being judgmental, mentioned Rabia’s “conversion” (*ihtida*) to Islam. In other words, it implicitly recognizes that Rabia was not a Muslim before. Most probably referring to this event, Garnett writes that a Turk of Salonica was “attracted by a girl belonging to the sect,

⁶³ BOA Meclisi Vükela Mazbatası 68/44. A. Safi mentions the same event. *Dönme Adeti*, 77–78.

and wished to marry her. The girl's friends were, however, so opposed to the match that they offered a bribe of four thousand *liras* to induce the wooer to abandon his pursuit of her. If a Dönme girl were led astray by an outsider, no effort is spared to recover the erring one, who, according to Dönme tradition, was then to be tried, condemned, and executed for her sin by a secret tribunal of her own people.”⁶⁴ Writing in 1887, Bent confirms how serious the Dönmes were about endogamy:

On one occasion, a Dönme girl was led astray. They didn't rest until they got her into their possession. They tried her before their own tribunal, and they condemned and executed her privately. Such is the bond of terrorism by which they are held together—a bond which none dare break. In these latter days some young educated Dönmes who have travelled abroad, and had intercourse with other nations, have resented this bond, and have entered into a compact not to marry until they can choose wives for themselves, and some actually have gone to live abroad, and taken to themselves wives from the non-Dönmes.⁶⁵

An interesting series of Ottoman documents from 1892 reveal another tragic attempt of a Dönme to marry an outsider. Containing eleven documents, this set details a lengthy legal dispute between a certain Selanikli Nigar Hanım, who lived in Skopje, and her father, Osman Efendi, who was a merchant in the same city. When Nigar Hanım decided to “convert” so as to marry a Muslim, the father sent a petition to the Ottoman authorities, claiming that his daughter was already married to a certain Halil Osman in Salonica. She had been pregnant but had a miscarriage (*iskat-i cenin*). Therefore, she needed to be sent back to Salonica. In her several petitions, Nigar Hanım tirelessly fought back to explain that her father, with the help of his lawyers, was setting a trap for her with the aim of bringing her back to Salonica where he knew all the lawyers and judges, and there to “end her life.” She urged the Ottoman authorities not to send her back, and, if they insisted on doing so, she threatened to commit suicide. In the next document, we understand that the Ottoman authorities were convinced by Nigar’s argument, having assumed that her father was indeed acting to prevent her from converting.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, we do not know how this affair ended. As discussed in the next chapter, the enforcement of endogamy began to loosen after the much publicized and celebrated historic marriage of a Dönme, Sabiha Sertel with a non-Dönme Zekeriya Sertel in 1915.

Another method of keeping familial and communal integrity was to keep genealogical records. Genealogies were meticulously prepared to document the bloodlines and keep the social borders intact. As Baer asserts, “like the Marranos, who considered themselves ‘the Nation,’ and the Jews, who were a people with a religion, the Dönmes kept genealogies because Dönme identity

⁶⁴ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey* (London: D. Nutt, 1891), 105.

⁶⁵ Bent, “Peculiar People,” 33.

⁶⁶ BOA, Babiali Evrak Odası, # 152-11390, 157-11723, 171-12782.

was part religion, part peoplehood, and part diasporic belonging.”⁶⁷ The two main functions of the family trees were to regulate marriages and inheritance issues. Levirate marriages and first-cousin marriages were also allowed, but everything still needed to be kept under control.⁶⁸

Based on an examination of various family trees, we can surmise that there was not a uniform way of keeping genealogy records among the Dönmes. In some cases, the trees follow only patrilineal lines (part of an Islamic tradition); in some, matrilineal lines (part of a Jewish tradition); and yet in others, a combination of both. In the earlier versions, usually the male progenitors were at the center of the genealogy, and the women were usually left out. For example, examining the family tree of Kapancı Osman Çelebi b. Abdullah from the seventeenth century, Saban demonstrates that the genealogy was kept for generations down to present time through the male lineage.⁶⁹ Likewise, Zorlu, without giving names, mentions three genealogies in which women were rarely mentioned. In one of them, he asserts, the first 200 people who followed Sevi were listed with their place of origin. Then the genealogy shows the partitions during the time of Yakub Çelebi and Osman Baba. Those who left the group during the first partition were labeled *kofer*, a traditional Jewish term for an unbeliever/rejecter of the true faith.⁷⁰ If the subsects called them *kofer* at some point, that would be another sign of the level of animosity prevailing between the groups. Baer, too, was able to examine several family trees, including that of the Kapancı Sarrafzadeler.⁷¹

All of the genealogies that I have personally seen were inscribed in Ottoman and Latin letters, and they usually followed the male progenitors. The daughters were mentioned in the trees, but not their progenies. The reason, I think, is because their names and progenitors were going to be mentioned in their husband’s family tree, and therefore there was no need to have two family trees. The most detailed one I was able to examine is the genealogy of the main Kapancı family, whose origin goes back to the mid-eighteenth century, and after whose name the group is called in the twentieth century. The question of who is to be included or excluded is apparent in the tree. Regardless of gender, only those who had a blood connection were included in the tree, and all the in-laws were left out. According to this tree, the head of the Kapancı family was Kavaf (Cobbler) Yusuf Agha (d.1780) and wife Ümüs Nene. Then comes his son İbrahim (b. 1820), and İbrahim’s eight children: Mehmet, Emine, Fatma, Ahmet, Nefise, Yusuf, Ayşe, and Zübeyde. Of these children, the well-known Mehmet Kapancı’s (1839–1924) children are listed as Namık, Ethem, Hasibe, and Safinaz. Emine had a son, Rasim. Fatma’s children were Dr. Rifat, Ethem, Ayşe, İsmet, and Emine. Ahmet Kapancı’s

⁶⁷ Baer, *The Dönme*, 27. For the genealogy and marriage connection, see also 27–32.

⁶⁸ Baer, *The Dönme*, 31.

⁶⁹ Giacomo Saban, “Sabbatean Genealogical Trees,” *Kabbalah* 4 (1999): 61–74.

⁷⁰ Zorlu, *Evet Ben Selanikliyim*, 33–36.

⁷¹ Baer, *Dönme*, 31.

children were Faiz, Mehmet, and Emine. Nefise's children were Hasibe, Fatma, Ata, and Ayşe. After the fourth generation, the list reaches up to the present day. Based on these names, it seems that only the children, and their children, were placed on the tree, and husbands and wives coming from outside of the family were not mentioned.

In modern times, the family trees seem to be kept for documenting the family history among the assimilated Dönmes. In many instances, religious or sociological meaning attached to them has been secularized. For example, a Kapancı Dönme told me that her brother was trying to make a computer database for all the Kapancıs, and so far was able to list 2,500 families. One would expect, however, that the practicing Dönmes would still have religious meanings attached to their genealogies.

Homes and Neighborhoods

The idiosyncratic lifestyle of the Dönmes was translated into the architecture of their houses as well as the arrangement of their neighborhoods, especially in their hometown, Salonica. In some Salonican neighborhoods heavily populated by the Dönmes, most of the Dönme houses were built to be connected to each other through secret passages. To keep their activities away from curious eyes, they walled the yards of their communal houses and meeting places, and curtained the windows. One Jewish observer of the time relates that "they live in sets of houses which are continuous or which are secretly connected, and for each block of houses there is a secret meeting place."⁷² A Karakaş Dönme elder, who passed away recently at the age of 101, still remembered the connected houses in Salonica by the names of their owners and their stories.⁷³ Bent elaborates on the houses even further:

All lived in blocks and streets adjoining one another, and . . . the houses in each block and street communicated with one another. Rabbi Nehemiah had told me this, and had added that in each block there is *Kal* or meeting-house, where their secret services are held, at which *peytan* for so they call the officiating priest, presides, reads their service in Judeo-Spanish, and since they have no windows to the front for fear of detection, they light their edifices with green-colored lamps.

As mentioned earlier, the Karakaş believers left one room or bed empty in their houses, with a green light next to it, hoping to invoke the spirit of Osman Baba, symbolically inviting him to return as soon as possible.

One of the most important sections of the Dönme house is the kitchen. Most religions include food observances as a vital part of their faith. Likewise, food has a sacred mystical meaning for the Dönmes, since it also became one of the ritualistic vehicles to transmit the Dönme identity from one generation to another. The religious act of food preparation by women especially served as an instrument of community, reparation, and renewal of identity. Expectedly,

⁷² Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics* (London: D. Nutt, 1891), ii.

⁷³ Related to me by one of his relatives in our personal communications.

the laws of *kashrut* were not part of kitchen etiquette, as the Dönmes deliberately break the *kashrut* rules. They have unique recipes and their blessings are designed for special occasions and festivals. Knowledge of the recipes and their blessings are still being put together in pamphlets by the traditional Dönme elders and distributed for the internal service. I was lucky enough to see one of those pamphlets but was not allowed to have a copy of it. Among others, *kiymalı tavuk* (chicken with ground beef), *mafış* (a type of pancake), *pastelikos* (a kind of pastry), *borekitas* (stuffed fillo dough), *beyinli börek* (stuffed pastry with brain), *pirasa köftesi* (leek balls), *kezala* (Süt Pidesi), *papuçaki*, *tezpişti*, *alhaşu*, *pastiç*, *Hacı Osman Kebabı*, and roasted lamb are some of the Dönme dishes.⁷⁴ Food is so central to Dönme life that one of the festivals was dedicated to fruits and their blessings. After all, if divine sparks are found everywhere, and we are to work toward restoring the wholeness of the divine (*tiqqun*), then the act of eating becomes a holy act in the Dönme tradition.

Dönme houses were located mostly in the heavily populated Dönme neighborhoods. Evidence from the twentieth century confirms that they mostly lived side by side in specific neighborhoods. Scholem claims that the Yakubis and Kapancıs lived in secluded quarters, which had been made available by the Turkish government in reward for their conversion.⁷⁵ It is important to remember that no “ghetto culture” existed in the Ottoman Empire, at least not in the European sense. It is still possible, however, to observe that religious and ethnic groups tended to live close to each other in mixed neighborhoods in the empire.

An old Kapancı lady (1900–1996) remembers that the Yakubis lived in the Yılan Mermeri neighborhood and were not in touch with the other subsects (Figure 6.1). The Karakaş and the Kapancıs lived in Mithatpaşa and Sabripaşa and called each other “Komşu Ağalar.” After sunset, she continues, “people gathered in the *Orta Evi* or *Kal*, and performed religious ceremonies.”⁷⁶ Corroborating this testimony, Anastassiadou writes that “the Kapancıs and Karakaş lived in the northeast of the city, sharing the same neighborhoods. The Yakubis lived in the northwest part of the city, in a neighborhood closer to the Turks.”⁷⁷ Struck clarifies the map even further:

Dönme in Salonika mostly live together in special neighborhoods, where the others could not disturb or observe their practices. The poor Karakaş mostly live in several neighborhoods side by side in the inner city. The Yakubis live in the two neighborhoods of Yeni-Kapu-Mahalessi and Tschingane Mahalessi in the west of the city. The *Kavajero* (Kapancıs) on the other hand live a special quarter in the center of Salonika; a sizable number of families however live in the distinguished suburb Kalamaria.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ For other Dönme dishes, see Kapancı Esin Eden, *Salonica: A Family Cookbook* (Athens: Talos, 1997); and Elqayam, “Sabbatean Cookery.”

⁷⁵ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect,” 155.

⁷⁶ Ilgaz Zorlu, “Sabatayçı Bir Anıt: Beyaz Emne,” <http://www.zwipublishing.8m.net>, accessed on September 1, 2013.

⁷⁷ Meropi Anastassiadou, *Selanik, 1830–1912* (İstanbul: TVY, 2001), 69.

⁷⁸ Struck, “Die Verborgenjüdische Sekte.”



FIGURE 6.1 Yilan Mermeri Square, Salonica, 1912. Courtesy of Huseyin Mevsim.

Other neighborhoods where the Karakaş and Kapancı members lived in Salonica were Balat, Katip Muslihiddin, Kasimiye, Sinancik, Haci Ismail, Haci Hasan, and Kadi Abdullah where Osman Baba's house and (later his tomb) was located. As Baer shows, by the turn of the twentieth century, wealthier Dönmes from each subsect, as well as some "liberated" ones, moved to the newly established upscale Hamidiye neighborhood, located outside the city wall.⁷⁹ To Akyalçın, a possible reason that some of the wealthy Dönmes stayed in their old neighborhoods was their desire to keep their traditional structures.⁸⁰

Charity and the Community Chest

One of the responsibilities of Dönme religious and lay leaders is to address financial concerns of the community and the well-being of its members. Having a communal charity chest was one of the cherished practices of the Ottoman Jews. The Sabbatean version of this institution was established during the time of Yakub Çelebi and aimed at helping the needy in the community, or using it for communal interest, including bribing the authorities if necessary, as in the case of the Hüsnü Pasha Affair in the 1860s. Leaders collected the alms/tax as either a mandatory or a voluntary contribution from everyone.

⁷⁹ Baer, *The Dönme*, 32–36.

⁸⁰ Dilek Akyalçın, "Les Sabbatéens Saloniens (1845–1912): Des Individus Pluriels Dans Une Société Urbaine En Transition," unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Paris: Ecole Des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2013), 265–282.

The charity fund was run by the community's secular leader or the treasurer, "keeper of the purse" (*baal kis*). This box was called the "Contingency Chest" or "Community Chest" (*Kaza-Kader Sandığı* or *Cemaat Sandığı*).⁸¹ At the end of the nineteenth century, Bent stated that "the Dönmes live comfortably, since they have no poverty amongst them, the richer members of the community assisting the poorer ones by an excellently organized system of charity."⁸² Garnett seconds him, asserting that "The Dönmes are highly respectable, industrious, and prosperous. Poverty, indeed, is said to be non-existent among them, the wealthy helping those less successful in worldly affairs and supporting widows and orphans by an admirably organized system of charity."⁸³ One of the Dönme interviewees of Baer confirmed their economic solidarity by telling him that during the Wealth Tax crisis in 1942, the Dönmes helped one another to pay their debts.⁸⁴

The practice of keeping a charity box continues to exist among the believing community, as can be seen in the notes on the margin of the aforementioned contemporary calendar. Bitek once told me that in the old days little children, with turbans on their heads and purses in their hands, would walk into the communal meeting and collect money. Similar to a Masonic practice of "*Dul Kadın Kesesi* (charity purse)," everyone contributed, he said, but those who needed, got the money out of the purse.

As part of the financial reorganization of the community, the issue of inheritance was taken care of by the communal leadership as well. Unlike Muslim wives, who inherit one-third of their husband's estates, or Jewish wives, who don't inherit from their husbands, Yakubi wives, for example, inherit half of the estate. This is yet more evidence of the egalitarian and cherished place of women in the Dönme tradition in early modern and modern periods.

Administrative Committees and Communal Houses

Each of the subsects was headed by lay and religious leaders and governed by assistants and administrative committees, which consisted of men and women members. As Oruç states, "the consultants busied themselves with the daily affairs of the sect and the women aides had the same responsibility for women. They took care of the sick elderly women, arranged funerals and weddings."⁸⁵ The founding fathers of the original community served as both lay and religious leaders, but in later generations the Dönmes, similar to Ottoman Jewry, separated the responsibilities of worldly and spiritual leadership. In cases of strong leadership, such as that of Dervish Efendi or his successor Ambarçı, one leader could dominate the other,⁸⁶ but in general each leader

⁸¹ Oruç, "Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?" May 27, 1927.

⁸² Bent, "Peculiar People," 33.

⁸³ Garnett, *Women of Turkey*, 105.

⁸⁴ Baer, *The Dönme*, 232.

⁸⁵ Oruç, "Dönmelik Nasıl Çıktı?" June 3, 1927.

held different and largely non-overlapping responsibilities. Ben Zwi's description of one of the Karakaş leaders gives us a glimpse into the nature of their religious and secular leadership.

The leadership was not hereditary. Religious leaders were chosen from a group of educated scholars who had been carefully selected and trained from their childhood. The lay leaders were usually chosen from among the economically prominent families. Unless some major problem arose to intervene, both leaders were chosen for life. Ideally, a community member was to seek advice on religious matters from the religious leader, and on worldly affairs from the lay leader. As the leaders were believed to be in communication with the "messiah," the advice and directions that they gave members were to be followed unquestioningly. As we repeatedly see, however, there were always unruly members who transgressed the communal rulings and did not heed what the leaders said.

Most communal affairs were dealt with in the communal houses. The Yakubis called the meeting place Saadethane, located on the Sabri Pasha Avenue in the Yilan Mermeri neighborhood, in a house in which Sabbatai Sevi was said to have lived for a period in Salonica. The Karakaş administrative house was called Orta Evi, located in the middle of the Karakaş neighborhood. Karakaş religious leaders were called Av-bet-din (chief of the court), Hoca, Haham, or Ogan.⁸⁷ Osman Baba's house (later tomb) in the Kadi Abdullah neighborhood served as a pilgrimage site that was visited by the Karakaş until it was destroyed in the 1917 fire. Since the population exchange in 1924, it has been a custom to bring soil from the site of Osman Baba's house, a *lieu de memoir*, and preserve it at home or put it in a grave as a blessing.⁸⁸ In the Kapancı case, it seems that leaders' houses, sometimes also called Orta Evi, served as the natural headquarters for communal administration and worship. Today, similar meeting places serve the same purpose in Istanbul.

Worship Houses and Temples

The Dönmes, similar to Jews but unlike Christians and Muslims, believed not in personal but communal salvation. Therefore, they needed to have a place to pray together. Each subsect had its own secret worship house in Salonica and possibly in other cities. It is hard to tell whether their places of prayer were much different from the communal houses, or if they were one and the same place. The worship houses were usually located inside walled houses that stood in the center of the Dönme quarters. Scholem asserts that "while the Dönme recited the prescribed prayers of Islam in the nearby mosques, the

⁸⁶ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 119.

⁸⁷ It seems that the name Ogan was taken as a surname by some of the Dönmes in Republican times. In 1937 the daily *Cumhuriyet* contained the following funeral announcement: "Ms. Aliye, the daughter of the late Emin Lütfi, a Salonican dignitary, and the wife of Recep Osman Ogan, died today in her apartment in the Şişman Hall, in Şişli. After the funeral prayers in Şişli [mosque], she will be buried in Üsküdar [Bülbül deresi]." Cited in Gövsa, *Sabatay Sevi*, 77.

⁸⁸ This practice was attested to by several individuals I interviewed. The site, which used to be part of a public park, was destroyed during the Agora excavations in Salonica a few years ago.

real religious worship, which reflected their genuine conviction, took place in the synagogues.”⁸⁹ I would not call those worship houses synagogues since they do not possess much synagogue paraphernalia such as an ark or Teva, but contain some “sacred” objects, such as special prayer books, a chest box, swords, busts, canes, and green lamps.

Naturally each subsect had different sacred objects in its worship house. All of them, however, must have been movable as a precaution if outside intrusion occurred. Later Dönme traditions suggest that the locations of the worship houses and communal houses were changed from time to time so as not to attract any attention from outside. It is rumored that this is still the case in contemporary Turkey, and apartment complexes serve the same purpose.

Dönme worship houses are the most secret of places, and they were tightly guarded. A few examples of nineteenth-century testimony give us some ideas about the nature of those places. Brunhes relates that Dr. Dreyfus was able to visit a Yakubi temple in Salonica and was quite amazed by its richness and artistic value.⁹⁰ Slousch, who worked for *Alliance Israelite*, mentions that the Yakubis had a sword and autographed manuscripts of Sevi in their temple.⁹¹ Probably referring to the same place, Hahn writes that there was an ancient sword and a long knife on the wall.⁹² This could also be the same place referred to in the previously discussed Hüsnü Pasha affair.

KarakAŞ RÜŞTÜ asserts that the worship houses (*ibadethanes*), in which men and women prayed together, were located in discreet places in their neighborhoods.⁹³ Based on possibly a KarakaŞ testimonial, Garnett reports:

The *Kals* or meeting-houses of the Dönmes are, it is said, built without windows, and are lighted with green lamps. K. also affirms that their services, at which they use the forms and rules of devotion appointed by their Messiah, are held in Judeo-Spanish; that they wear during their performance the white *tellith* of the Jews.⁹⁴

An anonymous young Kapancı man added that the KarakaŞ worship house has the bust of Osman Baba, since Osman Baba was deified among the KarakaŞ. He also said that “the bride and groom enter into the temple in the company of Mısırlı Agha [communal leader]. First the bride and then the groom kneel down before the bust of Osman Baba, and then kiss its hands and feet. Mısırlı Agha blesses them afterwards.”⁹⁵ Galante, confirming this practice, states that the KarakaŞ nuptial ceremony consisted of the bride and

⁸⁹ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect,” 155.

⁹⁰ Jean Brunhes and C. Vallaus, *La Geographie de L'Historie* (Paris: p.n., 1921), 594–596.

⁹¹ Nahum Slouch, “Les Deunmeh,” *Revue du Monde Musulman* 6 (1908): 493.

⁹² Hahn, “Über die Bevolkerung von Salonic,” 154–155.

⁹³ Vakit, January 18, 1924.

⁹⁴ Garnett, *Women of Turkey*, 107.

⁹⁵ Cengiz Sisman, “The Dönme Affair.” Nicholas Stavroulakis claims that the bust of Osman Baba, once in the possession of the KarakaŞ, has made its way to Livorno. Stavroulakis, “Shabbetai Zevi and the Dönme of Thessaloniki,” *Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel* 53 (1984): 103–114.

the groom paying homage before the statue of Osman Baba. The marriage was considered consecrated when a holy diamond-shaped bracelet was placed on the arm of the bride.

Unfortunately, not much is known about the interior designs of the Kapancı worship houses. One expects to find special Sabbatean objects there as well. Although it is not clear which subsects own them, there are several objects such as amulets, plates, a seal, a medallion, a vest, and a turban in circulation in the present day that are ascribed to Sevi.⁹⁶

Papagiannopoulos claims that by 1906 a wealthy Dönme subgroup had openly constructed a temple in ornate Italian style along the Shore Road of Yalilar street near the Villa Allatini in Salonica.⁹⁷ It is hard to believe the existence of such a visible, public prayer place, since there was no radical change in Sabbatean attitude in terms of revealing their “secret” identity at the turn of the century. He is most probably referring to the New Mosque, which was commissioned to an Italian architect by the Yakubis in 1902 (see the next chapter). Before this mosque was built, it is believed that the Dönmes used mostly the Kadi Abdullah Mosque, which was converted from a church in 1668, and Saatli Mosque, built in the eighteenth century, next to the government building in Salonica.

Courts

In the Ottoman legal system, only Jews and Christians were allowed to have independent communal courts. If any of their members became involved in a conflict with a Muslim or someone from another religious community, the case was to be brought to the Ottoman courts. If the Jewish and Christian crimes required corporal punishment, the culprits were supposed to be tried by the Ottoman authorities.

When both plaintiff and defendant were Jewish and Christian, they were supposed to use their own communal courts. To make sure that their members observed this principle, communal authorities strongly discouraged use of the Ottoman courts and even threatened their members with excommunication for doing so. For example, De Medina, great rabbi of Salonica in the sixteenth century, ruled that “one who turns to [non-Jewish] courts is wicked and does violence to the law of Moses.”⁹⁸ The most powerful tool the communal courts had was excommunication. We know of only a few instances where the Jewish and Christian authorities possessed their own prisons, possibly hidden from the Ottoman authorities, to handle those criminals. Despite these admonitions, Jews and Christians did not hesitate to use the Ottoman

⁹⁶ Abraham Danon, “Amulettes Sabbatiennes,” *Extrait du Journal Asiatique* (1910). Scholem, “Baruhia Rosh ha-Shabbataim ba-Saloniki”; Itzhak Einhorn “Three Shabbatean Plates,” *Pe’amim* 44 (1990); and Gad Nasi, “Three Sabbatean Objects,” in *Turkish-Jewish Encounters*, ed. Mehmet Tutuncu (Haarlem: SOTA, 2001).

⁹⁷ Apostolos Papagiannopoulos, *Monuments of Thessaloniki* (Salonica: Rekos, 1983), 113, 117.

⁹⁸ Goodblatt, *Jewish Life in Turkey*, 121.

courts when they felt that it was to their advantage. When they came to an agreement between themselves (*sulh*) in accordance with their tradition, for example, they used the Ottoman courts, believing that it had greater power to implement the verdict.

Since the Dönmes were considered Muslims, they did not have a recognized public court and had to use the Ottoman courts if a problem arose between them. But one of the Eighteen Commandments ordered the members “not to take refuge to the Islamic court, on the contrary, the law of Moses may serve for a rule in all of your quarrels. You shall always have your Beth-Din.” As a result, probably by refashioning their old Jewish courts, they developed their own court system, where they tried those who violated communal regulations in their own parallel universe. After all, there were several learned rabbis among the early believers, and it was not difficult for them to establish a new legal system. Excommunication was still one of the most powerful tools that a community could use to exercise power over members.⁹⁹ When the power of excommunication was insufficient, the leaders did not hesitate to use their own devices to punish the violators. Once in a while they even sought the opinion of some of the Jewish rabbis, who were still sympathetic toward the Dönmes. On this, Scholem has the following observation:

We know for certain that as actual knowledge of the Talmud decreased among them, they would for generations up to the 1860s—always secretly—seek out one of the most respected rabbis of Salonica who decided for them all doubtful cases that arose on the basis of Talmudic law. We are familiar with the names of a number of such “judges” of the Sabbateans from the circle of the “non-believers.” Only an investigation by the Turkish authorities (concerning which there may still be material in the Turkish archives), prompted by a denunciation of them in 1858 (others say 1864), induced the leaders of the Dönme to be more careful and to break off these clandestine relations with rabbinic authorities. In 1915 their archives still contained compendia of the Talmudic law and handwritten decisions of their rabbinic confidants concerning questions posed to them by the circle of the Dönme.¹⁰⁰

The Turkish investigation to which Scholem was referring is that of the aforementioned Hüsnü Pasha, who “discovered” one of the Dönme meeting houses. The existence of a flagellation set and a bloody knife in the house is a sign that their court implemented corporal punishment. This “discovery” also suggests that the meeting houses were used as courts. Scholem’s claim about their relations with the Jewish rabbis is substantiated by a rabbinical *responsum* from 1765, when the Dönmes sought an opinion from a rabbi.¹⁰¹ Yet another *responsum* from 1891 demonstrates how R. Raphael and Samuel Ardití

⁹⁹ Yalman, “Tarihin Esrarengiz bir Sayfasi.”

¹⁰⁰ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish Sect,” 152.

¹⁰¹ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and Redeemed*, 311–312.

“adjudicated on a question put to him by three bands of the faithful [i.e. three Dönme subgroups].”¹⁰² However, it is impossible to know how widespread this practice was or whether it was employed by all the subsects. We should recall here that secret Sabbateans and zealous anti-Sabbateans were still part of Jewish communities, and it would therefore be difficult to maintain such a clandestine relationship for long.

It is hard to assume that all the Dönmes always felt bound by the communal principles and never resorted to the Ottoman courts. Similar to other non-Muslim communities, they did not hesitate to use an Ottoman court either as a notary public or when one of the sides of the dispute was a non-Dönme. We have shown repeated instances of Dönmes acting against the expressed will of their community authorities on a variety of issues. It is also plausible that they would have sought justice in the Ottoman courts, especially in the late nineteenth century and with the general loosening of communal authority brought on by modernization.

In 1864, as part of adjusting to the “needs of the time (*icabat-i asriyye*),” without abolishing the Sheria courts, the Ottomans established “semi-secular” Nizamiye courts. In the last three decades of the century, the Nizamiye courts were the exclusive judicial forum for criminal matters. By the same token, the Nizamiye court was a default judicial forum for settling civil and commercial disputes throughout the empire, serving litigants from all sects and communities. Successfully challenging secular/religious duality and assuming the existence of “multiple modernities” in the nineteenth century, Rubin places these courts at the heart of the Ottoman legal reforms and modernization in the nineteenth century.¹⁰³ It would not be surprising to see the “liberated” Dönmes using these courts even more to settle issues among themselves.

Death, Burial, and Cemeteries

There was one thing that the Dönmes could not hide from outsiders: death. In Islamic tradition, a corpse must have a proper funeral ceremony in a mosque, and then in a cemetery. How could the Dönmes keep their distinct identity in this most public of rituals without transgressing either Islamic or Dönme law? The solution was to have two ceremonies. The first one was performed in one of the designated mosques and cemeteries in order to comply with Islamic law. The other one was performed in their communal houses, with a quorum of ten men.¹⁰⁴ With the guidance of a Dönme *hoca*, specific prayers (including a revised *kaddish*) were recited, after which the deceased was buried in the

¹⁰² Elkan Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1905), 146–147. Adler mentions also another *responsum* of R. Joseph David, the grand rabbi (d. 1737), who refers to the Dönmes in Salonica.

¹⁰³ Avi Rubin, *Ottoman Nizamiye Courts: Law and Modernity* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ A Jewish friend told me that once he was asked to join the quorum in his apartment complex in Nişantaşı in Istanbul, since the Dönmes could not find the tenth person to establish the quorum in performing the ceremony on that day.

designated cemetery. When they were in other cities, it is also believed that the face of the deceased was turned toward Salonica, as the city was considered to be “Mecca” for the believers.

We know that each subsect possessed their own cemetery, mostly located in designated sections of regular Muslim cemeteries. In Salonica, the Kapancı and Karakaş cemeteries were located next to the Melevihane, a Sufi lodge, while the Yakubi cemetery, adjacent to the Jewish cemetery, was located on Yeni Kapı Street, a street that led to the lodge.¹⁰⁵ There were also other Kapancı and Karakaş cemeteries in Salonica, but their exact locations are unknown. In 1915–1916, an anonymous photographer took pictures of the Melevihane and a cemetery next to it, before its demolition during the city’s expansion and Hellenization in the 1920s. During the expansion, the Yakubi cemetery was also destroyed, although not until the following decade.¹⁰⁶ Stavroulakis, who published the mentioned photo album with an introduction, writes that “along the east-west axis of the city [currently St. Demetrios Street], at either ends of which the [Jewish] cemetery and Melevihane lay, were three of the most important Dönme cemeteries.”¹⁰⁷ Visiting those cemeteries at the end of the nineteenth century, Struck was amazed at how well they were maintained:

The common thing about the three cemeteries and which differentiates them from the Turkish ones was the care devoted to the graves. In Salonika there are two of them, one in the East (Telli Kapu) and another in the west (Yeni Kapu). They are very beautiful, often in color-finished commemorative stones with original ornamental adornment and gilded Turkish inscriptions. The cemetery, next to the Melevihane is by far the oldest and most distinguished one and is the one in which the grave of Osman Baba was found.¹⁰⁸

Abraham Amarillo visited the Karakaş cemetery with a Sabbatean friend at the beginning of the twentieth century and, based on the tombstone inscriptions, he concluded that Osman Baba had died on June 15, 1720, and his son Abdurrahman in 1781.¹⁰⁹ Unless he had two tombs, the claim that Osman Baba’s tomb was in the Karakaş cemetery is unlikely, since, according to the most widely accepted Dönme tradition, Osman Baba was buried in his house, which in later centuries became a pilgrimage site. Writing in the 1920s, Rosanes stated that Karakaş “to this day revere the house where Osman

¹⁰⁵ On Selanik Melevihanesi, see John Brown, *The Dervishes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927); Mehmet Gökaçlı, “Balkanlıarda Meleviliğin Gelişimi ve Selanik Melevihanesi,” *Tarih ve Toplum* (Eylül 2000): 46–55.

¹⁰⁶ Stavroulakis thinks that it was the “earliest cemetery in use by the sect and some of the tombs dated back to the period just after Sevi’s death in 1676. The tombs were elevated and set with tall head and foot stones. The headstones bore inscriptions in Ottoman, Persian, or Arabic and were different from Ottoman burials in not having turbans.” Nicholas Stavroulakis, *Jews and Dervishes* (Athens: Talos, 1993), 24.

¹⁰⁷ Stavroulakis, *Jews and Dervishes*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Struck, “Die Verborgenjüdische Sekte,” 222.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Ben-Zwi, “The Sabbatarians at the Present Time,” 331–338.

Baba resided and was buried. The house is closed; only the *hucas* may enter therein. . . . The door on the side of the house from whence they took out the coffin has remained sealed to this day. The bed is made up as when he lived. They claim that the bed brings good luck to brides and grooms who touch it upon their wedding day, and before embarking on their voyage seafarers touch it as protection against storms at sea.”¹¹⁰ The only possible explanation of how there could be two graves for Osman Baba was that Karakaş might have had an imitation grave in the cemetery so as not to attract any suspicion to the house itself. Legend has it that Osman Baba’s mummy was brought to Turkey in the 1910s and entombed in the Dönme cemetery in Bülbülderesi, next to one of his son’s graves.

The cemetery next the Mevlevihane in Salonica was also visited by Hartmann in 1909. Accompanied by a Kapancı man, he found tombstones dating from as far back as 1716. He tells that the old man who accompanied him was in an ecstatic mood when they were touring the cemetery. Unlike Struck, Hartmann was not impressed with the gravestones, claiming that “they were not much different than the Turkish ones,”¹¹¹ a statement that might simply derive from his inability to see the details and symbols embedded in engravings.

There are several salient characteristics differentiating the Dönme tombs and cemeteries from Muslim ones. Unfortunately, the only physical remnants we still possess of the Salonica cemeteries come to us through photographs. Examining the two Dönme cemeteries in Istanbul gives us an opportunity to imagine what those characteristics might have been. Since the nineteenth century (if not earlier), the Dönmes have been buried in cemeteries outside of Salonica. For example, in the Bülbülderesi cemetery, there are several Ottoman-style tombstones, including those of the Balci and Dilber families, dated 1690 (Ali Agha, son of Abdullah), 1697 (Ali Agha), 1717 (Osman Agha), and 1736 (Osman Agha).¹¹² Baer thinks that they might have been brought by the Karakaş from Salonica in the twentieth century. But the high number of old tombstones in the cemetery suggests that it had been in use since the eighteenth century. In the same cemetery, an inscription on the tombstone of another Ali Agha (d. 1876) who was the Çorapçılar Kethudası (Chamberlain of the Stocking Business) in Istanbul begins with the following lamentation: “I spent my life in diaspora and never got a rest (Ömrüm geçti gurbet elde görmedim hiç rahati).” It is interesting to note that for some of the Salonican Dönmes, anywhere outside of Salonica was seen as diaspora.

Some of the other Dönme cemeteries in Istanbul are located in Maçka (mostly for Yakubis), Feriköy (mostly for Yakubis and Kapancı), Zincirlikuyu (mixed), Aşıyan (mixed), Karacaahmet (mixed), Edirnekapı (mixed),

¹¹⁰ Rosanes, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael*, 469.

¹¹¹ Martin Hartmann, *Der Islamische Orient* (Leipzig: Verlag, 1909), 185.

¹¹² Baer, *The Dönme*, 205.

and Nakkaştepe (mixed). There are also cemeteries in Izmir, Bursa, Ankara, Adana, and Antalya. Although the Maçka cemetery and the Kapancı section of the Bülbülderesi have not been in use since the 1950s, the Karakaş section of the Bülbülderesi is still active. Today the Maçka cemetery is totally abandoned and is in ruins. The Kapancı section of the Bülbülderesi cemetery appears to be in a state of mild neglect, while the Karakaş section is well maintained. In one of my recent visits in the summer of 2014, I was told by the cemetery guardians that there were four caretakers of the site. Active cemeteries are yet another proof of still-functioning Dönme communities.

It is still curious how the Dönmes were able to secure “separate” cemeteries for themselves since, according to Ottoman law (and now Turkish law), only Jews and Christians could have designated (sometimes walled and gated) cemeteries. Having “separate” cemeteries could be seen as yet another sign of the implicit Ottoman (and Turkish) recognition of Dönmes as being different, as well as the Dönmes’ self-conscious attempts to perpetuate their distinctiveness in the “hereafter.”

Among those cemeteries, the Bülbülderesi cemetery is the biggest and most unique one. Bülbülderesi, literally meaning Stream of Nightingale, is located in Üsküdar, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Its name refers to a Dönme legend and Talmudic tale, according to which the messiah would reappear when he heard the singing of the nightingales. Surrounded by a thick and high wall, it has several gates, including the ones on Selanikliler [Salonicans] Street. The cemetery has three sections, one belonging to the Muslims, the other two belonging to the Kapancı and Karakaş. A few Yakubi are also buried in the Dönme section, which could be an indication that the borders blurred in the twentieth century and that there was increasing intermarriage between the different subsects.

The Feyziye mosque is located by the entrance to the Bülbülderesi cemetery, which was built at the instigation of a certain Yusuf from the Karakaş family “Dilber” in 1882.¹¹³ Once you enter the Dönme section you can immediately sense that this is not a regular “Islamic” cemetery. The tombs vary in size and grandeur, from the simple ones (e.g., Havva Şermin Duhani, 1880–1927; Hasan Tahsin/Osman Nevres, 1888–1919; Bekir Bedri Etan, 1897–1963, who was the son of the founder of İşık Lycee) to the majestic and monumental ones (Osman Hüsamettin Ambacı, 1888–1967; Osman Cevdet İpekçi, 1919–1942; Mahmut Rauf Sirman, 1900–1969; Ismail Dilber, 1864–1937; Ibrahim Cemil Koyuncu 1900–1976). The life spans of those interred here vary from those who died at a very early age to others who lived to a quite advanced age. It is not unusual to find people who died at the age of ninety or one hundred. The professions mentioned are also highly varied: government clerks, military officers, doctors, professors, teachers, lawyers, journalists, telegraph men, tailors, sailors, bankers, merchants, businessmen, and agents for international

¹¹³ H. Konyalı, *Üsküdar Tarihi* (İstanbul: Yeni Zamanlar, 1976), I: 152–153.

companies. In line with the tradition of late Ottoman cemeteries, the women's gravestones tend to be more elaborately decorated.

On most of the tombstones, there is a reference to the deceased person's city of origin, Salonica. The term "Selanikli" (Salonian) as a euphemism for Dönme seems to have been adopted by the Yakubis and Kapancıs from the early days. The term is rarely used in the Karakaş section. One could see constant references to the city on gravestones dating as recently as the 1940s. In the 1920s and 1930s, Selanikli was used as a generic name for everyone who emigrated from there. The city reference was not only made to Salonica but also to other cities, such as Edirne, Skopje, Manastır, Sofia, and Kavala. These references to their city of origin do not necessarily mean that they were longing for return to those cities. The Dönme belief that the land on which the *maamin* steps is the Holy Land provided with them a sense of conformity wherever they lived. Because of this very belief, the thought of living in Diaspora or going to the Holy Land never really loomed large in Dönme thought, for the messiah was going to take them there when he arrived.

The immediate difference that strikes the visitor's eye when entering the cemeteries is the photos that are attached to the tombstones. It is also important to note that pictured tombstones were sometimes used—albeit infrequently—in some Muslim, Greek, and Armenian cemeteries in Turkey as well. Out of the thousands of tombstones in Bülbülderesi, only a few hundred of them have photos in a portrait style with the deceased elegantly dressed. The rest do not have pictures. Like the ones in the Maçka, most of the photos, until the 1940s, were inscribed on tombstones by an artist, Osman Hasan, whose name is still visible on the photos.¹¹⁴

Second, some of the tombs, but not all, are covered with marble. As opposed to Jewish tradition, in Islamic tradition, the graves are not supposed to be covered by concrete materials, but soil only. During one of his visits, Freely observed that an old lady had placed a few pebbles on the grave after her prayer in Bülbülderesi, a practice similar to one in the Jewish tradition.¹¹⁵

Another interesting feature is the lack of the phrase "ruhuna fatiha" (recite *el-fatiha* prayer for his or her soul) on some of the tombstones, a phrase that all the Muslim tombstones have. The inscriptions on the tombstones usually start with "huve'l-baki" (only God is the infinite one), and address the visitor as *ey zair*; there is a short life-story of the deceased and the cause of death, then a request for the visitor to recite *el-fatiha*; last there are the birth and death dates.¹¹⁶ Since the Yakubis were more meticulous in their outward observance of Islamic practice, almost all of the tombstones in Maçka end with

¹¹⁴ Baer gives his name as Osman Murat, which is a misreading of the name. For a rich collection and study of those pictures, see Memo Kosemen, *Osman Hasan and Tombstone Photographs of the Dönmes* (Istanbul: Libra, 2014).

¹¹⁵ John Freely, *The Lost Messiah*, 257.

¹¹⁶ For the Ottoman tombstones, see Hans-Peter Laqueur, *Huve'l-Baki İstanbul'da Osmanlı Mezarlıklar ve Mezar Taşları* (Istanbul: TVY, 1997).

el-fatiha. These inscriptions are placed on both the headstones and footstones, yet another distinct characteristic of Dönme graves.

Descendants of the important or “chosen” families, such as Koyuncu, Kermen, Dilber, İpekçi, Balci, Misirli, Sirman, Harmancı, and Kapancı, are usually buried closer to the middle sections of the cemetery. It is a privilege to be buried in close proximity to the chosen families. In the early 2000s, there was a small prayer room, erected across from one of the chosen families, then destroyed, probably because community elders did not want to draw unnecessary attention to these graves. The Karakaş Dönmes believe that it was necessary to bury the descendants of Sabbatai Sevi and/or Osman Baba and thirteen families (i.e., the thirteen holy man, Babas) in Bülbülderesi. The rest could be buried in other cemeteries. If we judge by the tombstones in the Karakaş section, it seems that these thirteen “chosen” or Nesl-i Şerif families were the descendants of Mustafa Çelebi, Belgradlı Osman Çelebi, Sofyalı Abdi Çelebi, Ali Çelebi, Halil Çelebi, Ömer Çelebi, İshak Çelebi, İbrahim Çelebi, Ahmet Çelebi, Çelebi İsmail Efendi, Ateş Molla Çelebi, Mehmet Çelebi, and Süleyman Çelebi. Each of them has symbols like lion, eagle, and deer. As the contemporary calendar indicates, the Karakaş have a special commemoration day for Osman Baba and the thirteen Babas.



FIGURE 6.2 Tombstone: Date palm tree, Maçka Cemetery, Istanbul. Photo courtesy of the author.



FIGURE 6.3 Tombstone: Citrus tree, Bülbülderesi Cemetery, Istanbul. Photo courtesy of the author.

The cemetery has other carefully embedded symbols that can only be detected by the trained eye. Graves are conceived to be the main gate to the messianic kingdom, and because of that, some of them were built, decorated, and inscribed with relevant messianic and mystic symbols. One of the articles in the Dönme credo accepts that “the God of truth, the God of Israel, will send the rebuilt sanctuary from above down to us.” Imitating this sanctuary, some graves were built in such a way that they resembled Solomon’s Temple with the two columns in front of it, representing J[akin] and B[oaz]. Other Temple symbolism, as prescribed in the Jewish biblical texts, such as columns, pomegranates, and lilies, can be found on several tombs.¹¹⁷

On several tombstones there are butterfly carvings, probably referring to the ephemerality of life, and transmigration of souls.¹¹⁸ On yet several other

¹¹⁷ “He [Solomon] cast two bronze pillars. . . . He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars. . . . He made pomegranates in two rows encircling each network to decorate the capitals on top of the pillars. . . . The capitals on top of the pillars in the portico were in the shape of lilies. . . . He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The pillar to the south he named Jakin and the one to the north Boaz. The capitals on top were in the shape of lilies.” Kings I, 7:15–20.

¹¹⁸ I am thankful to Memo Kosemen for this insight.



FIGURE 6.4 Tombstone: Nightingales, Bülbülderesi Cemetery, Istanbul. Photo courtesy of the author.

tombstones, both in Bülbülderesi and Maçka, there is a carving of the branch of a tree. I am still not sure whether the tree was acacia, citrus, or date palm. All of these trees have historic connotations. For example, the citrus tree symbolizes the redemptive power of Moses, who saved the Jews from hunger in the desert with citrus. Acacia recalls the murder of the chief architect of Solomon's Temple, Hiram, after which an acacia branch was laid on him, representing infinity. Another strong possibility is their reference to Arbat ha-Minim: The Four Species of the Sukkot festival that represents the temporary dwelling in the exile before the messianic age. These four species or plants are date palm (Figure 6.2), myrtle, willow, and citron trees (Figure 6.3).¹¹⁹

Along the pathways in the cemetery, there are several fountains, commissioned by important families, supposedly those of communal leaders. They symbolize the continuing stream of tradition and the transmigration of the

¹¹⁹ "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day [of Sukkot], the fruit of the beautiful [citron] tree, tightly bound branches of date palms, the branch of the braided [myrtle] tree, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days." Leviticus 23:40.



FIGURE 6.5 Tombstone: Sakladım Derdimi, Bülbül-deresi Cemetery, Istanbul. Photo courtesy of the author.

messianic soul from one generation to the next. Needless to say, fountains are not unique to Dönme cemeteries, as they can be found in almost all others.

One of the other recurring symbols on the graves is the rosebud. Given the powerful symbolism of everlasting love, represented by the rose and the nightingale in Eastern literature, it can be assumed that the believers aim to charm the nightingale, which could accelerate the return of the messiah. On many of the tombstones one could see the use of mystical language and imagery. Another theme on these tombstones is the reference to the “eternal light,” with which the souls aspire to unite. Signs of grief and suffering as reflected in the tragic life and death stories on the tombstones are also very common as well. Perhaps referring to diminishing hope about the return of the messiah, one of the tombstones (Figure 6.4.) powerfully depicts dead nightingales falling from a tree that were threatened by a snake—most likely symbolizing the Devil. In one of my visits to the cemetery, I was accompanied by a friend who did not have much background about the subject and said to me in a very surprised and yet innocent manner: “Aren’t these stories a bit too arabesque? It seems that none of them had a happy life after all!” Based on the stories told on the tombstones, no one could say that he was wrong.

In the Dönme cemeteries, the *burden of silence* is the overriding characteristic, best expressed in one of the famous inscriptions (Figure 6.5.): “I hid it, I did not tell my sorrow; I kept it secret and put it to sleep.” This is the axiom that was referred to by the anonymous author of the letter mentioned in the introduction.

As appears on a tombstone in Bülbülderesi, one of the Karakaş families chose “susmuş,” meaning (s/he) was silent, as the family surname: İbrahim Susmuş (1870–1944) and Hediye Susmuş (1875–1965). In the expression of messianic hope and despair, one could not choose a better name. This is a powerful signification that admirably denotes the dynamic and multifaceted meaning of the *burden of silence* and Dönme Kabbala.

CHAPTER 7

The Experience of Modernity

The Emergence of Orthodox, Reformist, and Liberal Dönmes

IN HIS BOOK ON forced Jewish converts in Spain and Portuguese in early modern times, *Conversos*, José Faur argues that they were a factor in the collapse of the ecclesiastical society of the Middle Ages and the rise of secularism and modernity.¹ Without being trapped by teleological reasoning, we can postulate that Faur's argument would hold true also for the Dönmes vis-à-vis Ottoman and Turkish modernity and secularism. This chapter is concerned mainly with the role of the Dönmes in the developing Ottoman-Turkish modernity as well as in their own social and religious transformations between the 1870s and 1920s, when the structure of the traditional Dönme communities began to break down.

In the nineteenth century, the Ottomans began to integrate into the new global system, and Salonica was perhaps the most receptive center of this global integration. Similar to Shanghai in the Far East, which grew in importance in the nineteenth century as Europe recognized its favorable location and economic potential, Salonica gained a new international popularity after the 1774 Turko-Russian Treaty that granted new privileges to European and Russian merchants. Afterward, as partly explained in the previous chapters, Salonica's star began rising, and Jewish, Christian, and Dönme inhabitants of the city were the first to take advantage of the new opportunities. The Dönmes were doubly blessed as they also enjoyed economic and political privileges that were otherwise exclusive to the Turks. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Dönmes were visibly prominent in Salonica, with their new neighborhoods, cemeteries, schools, government buildings, banks, media outlets, international trade companies, factories, and temples.

The Dönme schools, based on current Western pedagogic models of the time, played a pivotal role in the emergence of the new Dönme elite, as modern education was one of the engines of the age. As Somel and Fortna noted,

¹ Jose Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).

Western educational concepts and instruments had already been adopted by the Ottomans—in military schools (1780s), and then in civil/public education (1840s).² But the private Dönme schools were the most ambitious and effective in implementing the modern curriculum. Graduates of these schools became cosmopolitan citizens, active in every sphere of life from politics and the economy to the media and academia. By 1887, Bent pointed out that “most of the Turkish government clerks are Dönmes, and if you see in a tiny hole in the bazaar a turbaned scribe writing anything the illiterate country folk may want in the shape of appeals to the Pasha, or appeals to the tax-collector, you may be sure he is a Dönme.”³ As Leskovikli Rauf stated in 1911, the Dönmes previously engaged in business, but after the introduction of these schools, they became engineers, doctors, lawyers, and government officials.⁴

Dönme visibility brought new challenges to their lives. The official Ottoman attitude toward them was still neutral at the end of the century, but among the general population there was growing suspicion, resentment, and even jealousy toward them due to their prominence in the transformation of Salonica. The first available popular account, dated 1879, is from an Ottoman scribe, Ahmed Safi, who labeled the Dönme subsects “Terpuş, Karu and Honyoz” referring to Yakubi, Karakaş, and Kapancı, respectively, and portrayed them as “secreetive,” “crypto-Jewish,” “pretenders,” “anti-Islamic,” and “tricksters.”⁵ The Jewish attitude toward the Dönmes traditionally ranged from loathing to antipathy. The displeasure of both Muslims and Jews placed the Dönmes in a “double illegitimacy.”⁶ Until the 1920s, they chose not to confront any of the Islamic and Jewish challenges in public. The *burden of silence* remained in place.

In spite of their economic gains, the Dönmes had serious concerns with the encroachment of enlightenment and modernity in the nineteenth century. How were these small, tightly knit communities to maintain communal integrity in an age of globalization and secularization? The Eighteen Commandments had guided them in maintaining a secret community within the greater Islamic society, but it offered no solution for contending with the secularism and rationalism of modern life. Also, because of their inherently antinomian tradition, the Dönme youth were more susceptible to “foreign,” and “heretical” ideas than other groups. Not surprisingly, the new generation began fiercely attacking the traditions of their respective groups and even engaging in organized opposition, which led to intense adherence to the old ways for some and total assimilation for others. Despite the internal ban on

² Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839–1908* (Leiden: Brill 2001); Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State and Education in the Later Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ Bent, “A Peculiar People,” 26.

⁴ Leskovikli Mehmet Rauf, *İtтиhat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ne idi?* (1991; repr., Istanbul: Arba, 1991), 85–88

⁵ Safi, *Dönmeler Adeti*, 43.

⁶ Lucette Valensi, “Conversion, Intégration, Exclusion: Les Sabbateens dans l’Empire Ottoman et en Turquie,” *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (1996): 180.

being a member of another “brotherhood,” many disillusioned Dönmes joined the ranks of the Freemasons, the Young Turks, and later, the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP).

Similar in some ways to the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform branches of Judaism that resulted after the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) in the nineteenth century, three major Dönme attitudes in each subsect emerged in response to the modern challenges: orthodox, reformist, and liberal/assimilationist. The liberal ones, though small in number at the beginning, abandoned their religious identities and adopted the new “secular” supra-Ottoman identity that was shared by many other liberated Muslims, Christians, and Jews during the Tanzimat period. The reformist ones remained in the fold but sought to change some of their religious and social beliefs and practices. The orthodox ones strived to preserve the old tradition, whatever it took.

In the meantime, the Ottoman Empire had been struggling to preserve its integrity against both internal and external challenges. A number of important political-historical events shaped the trajectory of the empire in the “long nineteenth century”: the advancement of colonial powers on Ottoman lands; the ascension of the Pan-Islamist Abdulhamit II to the throne (r. 1876–1909); the Turko-Russian War and the subsequent Berlin Treaty (1877–1878), by which the empire lost almost two-fifths of its total land possessions in the Balkans and Anatolia; the Armenian revolts and massacres (1890s and 1915); the Second Constitutional Era and the rise of the CUP (1908–1918); the Balkan Wars (1912–1913); World War I (1914–1918); and the Turkish War of Independence and the birth of the Turkish Republic (1919–1923). Among these, the most fateful event for the Dönmes was the loss of Salonica to the Greeks during the Balkan Wars, an event that marked the end of traditional Dönme existence. A disastrous fire in Salonica in 1917, and then the international treaty of Lausanne in 1923 that dictated a forced population exchange between Turkey and Greece ended the most important chapter in Dönme history.

Modern Schools and the Rise of a New Generation

Living in Salonica in the 1870s, Mrs. Blunt, the wife of an English consul, visited two Dönme schools (one for boys and one for girls) and left the first detailed account of them. Although a little baffled with the lack of order and low quality of education in these schools, she was still appreciative of their potential:

The *Dulmes* [sic], who are found in large numbers only at Salonica, have of late years shown a great desire to promote education among both sexes of their small but thriving community. The course of study followed in their boys' school is similar to that of the *Rushdiye* [secondary school]. . . . It has four classes, subdivided each into three forms; three masters, aided by monitors, superintend the studies. I visited this school and found a great lack of order and discipline. First-class boys, seated on benches and before desks, were mixed up with the little

ones, who, I was told, were placed there in order to be broken in to the school routine. . . . Some of the big boys were examined, and as far as I was able to judge, seemed well advanced in writing and in the knowledge of the Turkish language, but they did not appear equally well versed in mathematics or scientific branches of study, which were evidently taught in a very elementary form. . . . It must be borne in mind, however that this establishment, which is said to be the best in the town, was opened only eighteen months ago. . . . The *Dulme* girls' school of Salonika was held in a house containing a number of small rooms, in which the pupils were huddled together. One of these rooms was fitted up with desks and benches that might have accommodated about thirty children; when I entered all the pupils were doing needlework. Shemshi Effendi, the director, a young man of some enterprise and capacity, and a good deal of intelligence, led the way and ordered all to stand up and *salaam*. . . . [T]hey were learning plain sewing, crochet, tapestry, and other ornamental work, taught by a neat looking Greek school-mistress. A good many of the pupils were grown-up girls, who sat with veils on. . . . Defective as this establishment is, it is deserving of praise and encouragement as a first attempt which may lead to a higher standard of education among Turkish women.⁷

These schools were opened by Şemsi Efendi (Shimon Zwi, 1852–1917), a Kapancı, in the early 1870s (probably 1872, a year before the *Alliance* school was opened in Salonica), eighteen months prior to Blunt's visit to the town in 1874. Ebu'l Mecdet claims that a few years before this school was started, another Kapancı, Ismail Efendi, had opened a primary school where he was educating the children with the new method (*usul-i cedid*) for the first time. And a few years later, Hoca Abdi Kamil Efendi, also a Kapancı, worked as an assistant for Şemsi Efendi's schools for boys and girls.⁸

Within a decade, all the Dönme subsects had opened much larger schools in Salonica and had begun educating their children with a modern curriculum: the Kapancı opened the Terakki (progress) School in 1877, the Karakaş began the Feyziye (the one that enlightens) School in 1885, and the Yakubi established the Selimiye or Terakki (?) School (date unknown). Before these, the Dönme either sent their children to regular Turkish schools⁹ or educated them in their own secret private settings.

If we rely on Blunt's and Ebu'l Mecdet's accounts, then we have to revise our assumptions about Şemsi Efendi's famous school, which was considered the first Western-style primary school in the history of Turkish education: first, there might have been another "modern" school before Şemsi's school; second, Şemsi's school may have been established earlier than we think; third,

⁷ E. Blunt, *The People of Turkey* (London: J. Murray, 1878), 170–175. She also gives the list of seven *mahalle mektebi* (primary schools), one *ruşdiye* (middle school), and one small private school for Turkish girls in Salomica.

⁸ Ebu'l Mecdet, "Sabatayistlik," *Türk Sesi* 199:10 Cemaziyelahir 1342 (1924): 1.

⁹ Schauffler, "Shabbathai Zevi and His Followers," 4.

it may have been larger than we usually assume; and fourth, it also had a section for girls. Şemsi was most probably educated in a school in Salonica that was run by foreigners, possibly by missionaries, and then served as a Turkish teacher in one of them. His knowledge of French led him to an interest in the French education system, since French culture and language was the dominant global culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. Using the methods and instruments of the modern schools he had attended, Şemsi started his own schools with a new curriculum. He was a visionary and creative genius, who influenced all other Dönme educational institutions that were opened during his lifetime. His first school soon attracted the attention of the Ottoman officials, so much so that Governor Mithat Pasha paid it a visit, and Mithat Pasha's successor Galip Pasha helped to establish an even better and larger school, an endeavor that also received financial support from Ahmet Kapancı.

His new curriculum was resisted by the traditionalists, so Şemsi had to close his school and reopen it several times. His second school was, like the first, in a Karakaş neighborhood, located just a few blocks from the seat of government.¹⁰ Among the most famous attendees were Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), Nuri Conker (officer, politician, and childhood friend of Atatürk), and General Galib (Pasiner). His school was under constant attack by both traditional Dönmes and Muslims, who accused him of utilizing “infidels’ methods” in his classrooms. At this time, the debate between the supporters of the old and new educational methods at the Empire level was at its peak. Under increasing pressure, Şemsi had to close his school in 1891 permanently. As a leading reformist Dönme religious thinker, Şemsi’s vision was to unite the Dönme communities and establish one major school for all of them. But even though the traditional borders between the subsects were weakening, they were still strong enough to prevent him from realizing this project. Instead, each community opened its own private school, often the work of their own respective visionaries who had lived or been educated in Europe or had attended schools established by foreigners and missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. For example, Mısırlızade Abdullah Zeki Efendi, founder of the Feyziye School, received his education in France.

After the death of Şemsi, both the Terakki and Feyziye schools claimed him as their founder. During the formative period, it seems that Şemsi, a Kapancı, had grown disillusioned with his own group and became closer to the Karakaş. After the closure of his own school in 1891, he served as a religion teacher at the Feyziye School until 1911, and then moved to Istanbul (Figure 7.1). When he died in 1917, Şemsi was buried in the Istanbul Bülbül deresi cemetery, in the Karakaş section, in a plot that borders the Kapancı section. This placement—very possibly at his own request—can be interpreted as his desire to unite the Dönme groups.

¹⁰ Mert Sandalçı, *Feyz-i Sibyan'dan Isık'a: Feyziye Mektepleri Tarihi* (İstanbul: Fevziye Vakfı, 2005), 25.



FIGURE 7.1 Şemsi Efendi and one of his students, Nuriye Fuat [Akev Eden], Istanbul, 1911. Courtesy of Şişli Terakki Vakfi.

Interest in a more “modern” European education had existed in the empire since the beginning of the century. Most of the Ottoman intellectuals and bureaucrats who were behind the Tanzimat reforms had either received their education or served as Ottoman officials in Europe. The Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian, and Jewish communities as well as the various missionary groups all established their own private Western-style schools, implementing a curriculum based on either the French or American educational systems. As far back as the 1850s, American missionary groups had discussed the possibility of opening schools to educate the Jews and Dönmes in Salonica.¹¹ Starting in

¹¹ Sisman, “Modernizers or Failed Proselytizers?”

the 1860s, *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools began to appear and quickly mushroomed within “oriental” Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere. The *Alliance* opened its first school in Salonica in 1873; and two additional schools, patterned after Western institutions, were founded by the Allatini family in 1875.¹² The Dönme visionaries saw that the nature of education had changed; by the 1870s, they had sufficient financial means and philosophical vision to establish new schools exclusively for their own children.

Especially after the Berlin Treaty in 1878, the struggle for nationalist influence among the Bulgarians, Greeks, and Serbians in the Balkans was largely waged through schools.¹³ Ottoman authorities were alarmed by the increasingly blatant national propaganda these institutions were disseminating. Since the time of Mahmud II (1808–1839), Ottoman officials had been in favor of modern public education despite popular opposition. These officials undoubtedly appreciated Dönme schools, which they considered to be regular Turkish schools, in their fight against non-Ottoman nationalist schools. That’s why we repeatedly see the officials “rewarding” the Dönme schools, either by assisting or participating in their activities. For example, Şemsi Efendi received several sultanic honors as recognition for his service to education.

As noted earlier, the dream of unifying the subsects could not be realized and each subsect started its own initiative. The Kapancı Terakki (Progress) School was established in a Kapancı neighborhood in 1877 and had primary and secondary sections. As the name indicates, the founders were inspired by the Enlightenment and positivist ideals of the time. The famous Kapancı family was behind the project. The founders and early board members were all merchants, bankers, and teachers with international experience and connections.¹⁴ The most well-known were Mehmet Kapancı, Yusuf Kapancı, Ahmet Kapancı, Duhani Hasan Akif, Mustafa Fazıl (1854–1935), Osman Ehat (1859–1899), Abdi Bey (a former Ottoman consul in Iran),¹⁵ Abdi Kamil, Dervish Efendi, and Halil Vehbi Efendi.¹⁶ Ebu'l Mecdet adds the names of Hoca Rakım Efendi and Hoca Şevki Efendi to the list. On March 27, 1880, the name of the school was changed to Selanik Terakki Mektebi (Salonica Progress School). By 1907, it had three buildings: a boy’s school (Figure 7.2.), a girl’s

¹² For a list of the schools in Salonica at the end of the century, see Eugene Cooperman, “Turco-Jewish Relations in the Ottoman City of Salonica, 1889–1912,” unpublished Ph.D. thesis (New York University, 1991), 307.

¹³ Douglas Dakin gives the following startling statistic for the number of schools in Macedonia in 1902. “Greeks have 1000 schools with 70,000 students; Bulgarians have 592 schools with 30,000 students; and Serbians have 233 schools.” Cited in Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 69.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Dönme globalization, see Marc Baer, “Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and the Dönme in Ottoman Salonica and Turkish Istanbul,” *Journal of World History* 18: 2(2007):141–170.

¹⁵ Mehmet Alkan, *Terakki Vakfı ve Terakki Okulları İmparatorluk’tan Cumhuriyet’e Selanik’ten İstanbul'a* (İstanbul: Boyut, 2003), 329.

¹⁶ School’s website: <http://english.terakki.org.tr/Foundation/728167602155051.asp>.



FIGURE 7.2 Selanik Terakki Mektebi for Boys, 1900. Courtesy of Şişli Terakki Vakfı.

school, and a boarding school in the new Hamidiye neighborhood.¹⁷ After World War I, the headquarters of the school was moved to Istanbul in 1919 and its name became Şişli Terakki Mektebi (Şişli Progress School) in 1921; it was located in various buildings in Nişantaşı until 1935, when it moved to its modern buildings in Levent in 1994.¹⁸

The Karakaş group opened its own school, the Feyz-i Sibyan (Enlightenment of Youth) on December 14, 1885. The school was initially located in a humble building in the Katip Muslihiddin neighborhood and later relocated to the Hacı Ismail neighborhood—both of which were predominantly Karakaş areas. It was first envisioned by Misirlizade Abdullah Zeki, a member of a prominent Karakaş family. He was proficient in several languages and worked as a translator in one of the government offices in Salonica. His desire to establish a modern school for his community was not realized in his lifetime, but his son accomplished his father's dream. Abdullah Zeki had five sons and a daughter: Süleyman Şevket, Mümeyyiz Mustafa Tevfik, Osman Vasif, İbrahim Ziver, Mehmet Behçet, and Naile. Under the leadership of Misirlizade Mustafa Tevfik (1851–1934), who had previously worked as a government clerk, the school was opened with four classrooms and fifty students. By 1890,

¹⁷ Baer, *The Dönme*, 50.

¹⁸ The school and its property was reorganized under the Şişli Terakki Foundation in 1967. The new board contained mostly members of the prominent Kapancı families: Abdurrahman Malta, Ahmet Elberger, Akif Akev, Fahri Refiğ, İbrahim Telci, Necdet Ücer, Nuri Türen, Osman Ücer, Reşat Atabek, Yusuf Kapancı, Ata Refiğ, Rifat Edin, Fikret Güvenç, Mehmet İnal, Memduh Paker, Nazmi Eren, Vedat Uras, Evcet Gürses, and Neşe Deriş. See School's website.

only four years after the school's founding, enrollment had risen to 550, and at the turn of the century, to 700.

Similar to the situation at the Terakki School, the first board members of the school were predominantly involved in commerce: Mustafa Tevfik, Prof. Mustafa Bey, a book dealer; Mustafa Faik, an attorney; and Mustafa Cezzar, Karakaş Mehmet, and İpekçi Ismail, merchants. Among the early graduates were Süleyman Kani İrtem (who later became governor of Istanbul), Mehmet Cavid (leading member of the CUP and minister of finance), Karakaş Rüştü, (merchant), and Akif Fevzi [Koyuncu]¹⁹ Efendi (writer).²⁰ Mustafa Elöve, one of the board members of the Feyziye School Foundation, wrote that after the Balkan Wars, another branch of the school was opened in Istanbul in Sultanahmet, Istanbul, in 1917 by Mustafa Tevfik, who moved the school to Nisantaşı, Istanbul, six years later, when town became a new Dönme neighborhood. During periods of economic crises, the school was heavily supported by the Dilber and İpekçi families. On December 14, 1935, the school changed its name from Feyziye to Işık (Light), and Atatürk sent a congratulatory telegram. New board members included a diverse group with international connections in literature and commerce such as İsmail İpekçi, Süleyman İrtem, Fahir İpekçi, Cevdet İpekçi, Vahit İpekçi, Avni Belor, Nami Göksun, Ali Salim Erpul, Zeki Acar, Suzi Bleda, Fahri Şuhubi, and Avni Bey.²¹

Some of the smaller Karakaş schools were Şemsü'l-Maarif (Istanbul, 1873),²² Feyziye (Üsküdar, Istanbul, 1892),²³ İttihat İntüs İdadisi (Bakırköy, Istanbul, 1910), Yeni Mekteb (Bakırköy, Istanbul, 1915), Feyz-i Atı (Salonica, 1910s), Feyz-i Atı (Çemberlitaş, Istanbul, 1917), Şişli Lisan (Istanbul, 1919), Feyziye (Nişantaşı, Istanbul, 1923), Feyziye (Büyükdere, Istanbul, 1925?),²⁴ and Feyziye (Bafra, Samsun, 1924–1926). Among these schools, the Feyz-i Atı (Light of the Future) had a quite interesting history. İbrahim Alaattin Gövsə ran the school until 1926 and Nakiye Elgün (1882–1968), who was a well-known Turkish educator and one of the first women parliamentarians,²⁵ ran it until 1928.²⁶ When the school burned down in 1930, Karakaş Kudret

¹⁹ Throughout the book, the names in brackets after personal names refer to the official last names that people assumed after the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

²⁰ Işık High School, *Yearbook* (1992), Introduction.

²¹ Işık High School, *Yearbook*.

²² It was founded by the Dönme Abdi Kamil Efendi who also established a school in Salonica. See Aksin Somel, "Private Muslim Schools in Istanbul during the Age of Abdülhamid II," in *Abdülhamid II: Istanbul during the Age of Modernization*, ed. Coşkun Yılmaz (Istanbul: ATM production, 2010).

²³ It was built by Kabile Hafize Hanım next to the Feyziye Mosque in Bülbülderesi. Hakkı Konyah, *Üsküdar Tarihi* (İstanbul: Yeni Zamanlar, 1977), II: 308.

²⁴ An undated archival document from the early Republican times refers to a fund allocated for the Feyziye School in Büyükdere. Cumhuriyet Arsivleri #180.9.0.0/160.768.4.

²⁵ After women's suffrage was enacted in 1934, she was elected as a parliamentarian, representing Erzurum in three consecutive terms.

²⁶ Anonymous, *Leyli ve Nehari Feyziati Liseleri Tarifnamesi* (İstanbul: p.n., 1929). The first Turkish Miss Universe (1932), Keriman Halis (d. 2012), was a graduate of this school.

Azmi Bey [Sandalcı] purchased a building, called Çiftesaraylar, on the shore of Arnavutköy (north of Istanbul on the Bosphorus) and donated it to Feyz-i Ati in 1931, at which point the name of the school was changed to Boğaziçi Liseleri.²⁷ According to a school document, dated June 27, 1938, the school was directed by a Yakubi Dönme, Hifzı Tevfik Gönensay (1892–1949), who was himself a Feyziye graduate.²⁸ This was yet another sign that the borders between the subsects had continued to blur and the interaction between liberated Dönmes was on the rise in those years. From the same document, we also learn that one of the Feyz-i Ati physics teachers, Kenan Sarier, served at different Karakaş schools, including the Feyz-i Ati primary school, Bakırköy İttihat İnüs İdadisi; the high school Feyz-i Ati; and the Bafraya Özel Feyzi Cumhuriyet Lisesi in Samsun (1924–1926). Many Dönmes who were in the tobacco business had settled in Samsun after the population exchange in 1924, and it is thus not surprising that the Dönmes would have a school in the area.

The Yakubis had always been distant from the other two subsects in their social relations. That was also reflected in their schooling practice. The mayor Hamdi Bey opened a new school, called Selimiye, and later Hamdi Beyler, in Salonica,²⁹ but it did not survive. From the memoirs of a famous poet, Yahya Kemal, we learn that he attended a Dönme school, Mekteb-i Edeb, that was opened in the Jewish neighborhood in Üsküp (Skopje) in 1892. The school was run by Ali Galip Efendi, probably a Yakubi, who used modern classrooms and techniques to teach the children. In relating his experience, Yahya Kemal tells that his transfer from the traditional school to Mekteb-i Edeb was his transition from the East to the West.³⁰ As the communal borders melted, the Yakubis were the first ones to send their children to the Feyziye and Terakki schools. For example, the Yakubi Ahmet Emin Yalman (1888–1972) studied at the Terakki, and Hifzı Tevfik [Gönensay] studied at the Feyziye.

The schools also provided a natural milieu where Dönme children could mingle and socialize. To the best of our knowledge, the schools in Salonica almost exclusively served Dönme children, but the subsequent Dönme schools opened in other cities were open to the public. The epitaph on the tombstone of Mustafa Tevfik (1851–1934), the founder of the Karakaş Feyziye School, reads that he dedicated his entire life to “the good and well-being of his own kind.”³¹ Likewise, Mehmet Kapancı’s (d. 1925) tombstone in Bülbülderesi reads that “he devoted himself to charity, serving and assisting the schools and children of his homeland.” These inscriptions imply that the schools were

²⁷ The school continued to operate until 1951. Among its famous students were Rauf Denktaş, Kadir Has, Emir Galip Sandalci, Cihat Arman, Şefik Femenen, and Can and Sadık Eliyeli. Interestingly, the famous anti-Semite and Turkish ultra-nationalist Nihal Atsız taught there in the 1940s. See Abdurrahman Küçük, *Dönmeler Tarihi* (Ankara: Rehber, 1990), 547.

²⁸ I am thankful to Barry Kapandji who provided me with this document.

²⁹ Yıldız Sertel, *Annen: Sabiha Sertel Kimdi?* (İstanbul: Belge, 2001), 30–31.

³⁰ Yahya Kemal, *Çocukluğum, Gençliğim, Hatıralarım* (İstanbul: Fetih Cemiyeti, 1973), 28–29.

³¹ Baer, *The Dönme*, 209.

initially established for the well-being of the Dönme subgroups, although this intent does not necessarily denote actual practice all the time. According to an Ottoman document dated 1907, Jewish students were accepted to the schools after this date.³² Whether there were any non-Dönme students in the Salonica schools before 1907 is still unclear. The only examples I was able to uncover of non-Dönmes attending the schools in Salonica were the cousins of the Salonican-born writer, Münevver Ayaşlı (1909–1999). In her memoirs, she mentions that her relatives attended Şemsi Efendi's schools in the 1890s.³³ Mert Sandalçı, a historian of the Feyziye Schools and also of Karakaş descent, writes that after the population exchange in 1924, "they did not teach about the Dönme religion in the schools"³⁴ implying that, as Baer suggests, the schools had a Dönme character earlier.

The primary aim of the school founders was to raise a generation who would benefit from modern education while also retaining some of the traditions of the community. For most of the Ottoman modernists in the nineteenth century, a typical concern was whether it was possible to be exposed to Western technology and civilization without adopting Western morality and lifestyle. Although in both the Muslim and Dönme cases, morality was grounded in religion, the question now became whose version of religion was going to be the basis of morality: Orthodox or Reformist? The aim of the Dönme school founders was realized but not to the fullest extent, as the schools did not produce identical graduates. In later scholarship, the graduates of these schools were homogenously seen as the precursors of the secular citizens of the modern Turkish Republic. Historians or memoir writers, including Ahmet Emin and Sabiha Sertel, have re-conceptualized past events with teleologically constructed ideological and cultural biases. Baer is right when he criticizes this approach, by saying that "they ignore the fact that Dönme progressiveness, religiosity and worldliness were interrelated."³⁵ But the problem with this statement, as well as with the assessment of so many others, is that the authors treat the Dönmes as a homogeneous, undifferentiated category. The attitudes of orthodox, reformist, and assimilationist Dönmes varied immensely on the role of religion, science, and progress at the turn of the century. For example, while orthodox Dönmes did not see any contradiction between science and religion, Assimilationist Dönmes did not hesitate to advocate an inflexible drive toward "progress" and "modernization" at the expense of religion and tradition, as seen in many articles published by them in an arts and science

³² On August 16, 1907, on a suggestion made in the name of the Jewish community, twenty Jewish boys were registered in the school at a reduced price for the purpose of spreading the Ottoman language among Jewish children.

³³ In her memoirs, Ayaşlı states that a "many Turkish children went to the school of Şemsi Efendi: my older brother, the daughter of my mother's sister, Şazile Hanım and her sons, Nejat Bey and Vedat Bey." Cited in Rifat Bali, *A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey* (Istanbul: ISIS, 2008), 153. Ironically, it is rumored that the Ayaşlı family was also of Dönme origin.

³⁴ Sandalçı, *Feyz-i Sibyan'dan Isik'a*, 31.

³⁵ Baer, *The Dönme*, 100.

journal, *Gonca-i Edep* (The Rosebud of Literature) in 1883–1884.³⁶ Therefore, it is perfectly possible to consider some of the Dönmes, as well as some of the “liberated” Turks, as the precursors of secular citizens of the Republic.

The emphasis on commerce and foreign languages was so strong in Dönme schools that the Karakaş at one point offered to have a school of commerce that served all the communities, although this offer was never realized.³⁷ Deringil presents a case from 1904 when an unexpected suggestion came from Ottoman officials who were worried about the spread of “harmful” ideologies among the students studying abroad or in schools run by foreigners in the empire. An Ottoman inspector reports that “[these young people] go to Switzerland and France to study and acquire experience in commerce. Or they attend the schools of commerce in Salonica belonging to the French, Italians, Greeks, or Romanians. Either way, this is detrimental to their Islamic and Ottoman upbringing.” The author of the document then suggests that additional classes in commerce and finance in the curriculum of Terakki and Feyziye would prevent the pollution of their Islamic morals.³⁸ In the same year, in both schools, new courses were added that would aid future civil servants, including classes on political economy, commercial law, physical geography, chemistry, and economics.³⁹ Kapancı opened a school of commerce for girls in 1908, on land donated by Dönme Emine Hanım, wife of the deceased entrepreneur Osman Telci Efendi.⁴⁰ As Figure 7.3 shows, they were dressed and educated in Western style.

Dönme women’s exposure to a Western lifestyle and education seems to precede the schools in Salonica. A 1908 edition of the *Journal de Salonique* contains a very interesting advertisement, according to which “Madamoisselle Dervetoglu, a knowledgeable woman and certified gynecologist of Boston University, [who had] practiced in New York,” was coming to establish herself in Salonica.⁴¹ Due to the paucity of Turkish Muslim women who would have had the opportunity to receive such an education at that time, we can surmise that the woman was a Dönme who had studied abroad.

The students of Dönme schools were very well educated for international commerce and service to the empire by the time they graduated at the age of eighteen to twenty. They were uniquely prepared to be successful merchants due to their strong training in trade and foreign languages and their international connections through their families. In Salonica, Governor Mehmed Tevfik Bey recounts in his memoirs that the Feyziye was superior to all other

³⁶ For the transliteration of the entire collection see Şeyda Oğuz and Sevengül Korkmaz, *Selanik’tे Osmanlı Matbuati: Gonca-i Edep* (Istanbul: Turkuaz, 2009).

³⁷ Sandalci, *Feyz-i Sibyan’dan Isik'a*, 57.

³⁸ BOA, Y.Mtv 260/200, June 15, 1904. Cited in Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 97.

³⁹ Baer, *The Dönme*, 53.

⁴⁰ *Journal de Selanique*, cited in Cooperman, “Turco-Jewish Relations,” 217.

⁴¹ Cited in Cooperman, “Turco-Jewish Relations,” 220.



FIGURE 7.3 Students and teachers of Selanik Terakki School, Salonica, 1916.
Courtesy of Şişli Terakki Vakfi.

schools and produced successful civil servants.⁴² In 1909, Cavid Bey was the guest of honor at the twenty-fifth anniversary of Feyziye, where prominent Young Turk representatives Talat Bey, Rıza Tevfik, and Emmanuel Carasso were also present. Their presence gives some indication of the importance attached to the school by Ottoman officials.

In addition to the modern schools, the Dönme press and media also contributed to the formation of Dönme cultural capital. Similar to the schools, these sources were somewhat revolutionary in tone. The media were cultural platforms where Dönme intellectuals covertly or overtly debated global issues as well their own traditions. *Gonca-i Edep* was the first journal operated by emancipated Dönme intellectuals from all three of the subsects. The forces behind the journal were the Yakubis Osman Tevfik (1866–1948) and Fazlı Necip (1863–1932).⁴³ Dedicated to literature, science, philosophy, and religion, the journal received contributions from teachers and students of the Terakki and Feyziye Schools as well as from Dönme civil servants and soldiers. With the aim of enlightening and educating the public with a modern mind-set, the

⁴² İlber Ortaylı, “Ottoman Modernization and Sabbateanism,” in *Alevi Identity*, ed. T. Olsson (Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute, 1998), 97–104.

⁴³ Fazlı Necip was the son of Abdurrahman Efendi, a clerk in the Salonica Public Debt Office. He married Rebia, the daughter of Osman Tevfik’s brother, Abdurrahman Nafiz, and the couple had two children: Mustafa Necip [Bir] and Meliha [Til]. Necip was also author of several novels, translator of several books, and director of two movies.

journal used very plain language in exploring a myriad of different subjects such as “kuyruklu yıldız (shooting star),” “gurub-u şems (sunset),” “Napoli’ye seyahat (trip to Napoli),” “ilm-i jeoloji (geology),” and “inci istihsali (pearl production),” and included translations of articles from European languages. A close look at the articles shows that most of the information in them was at a very rudimentary level, showing both their level of knowledge as well as their audience. After *Gonca-i Edep*, Osman Tevfik started another short-lived journal, *Ravza-yı Edeb*, which he published while he was a calligraphy and history teacher in the Military High School where he became Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s second Dönme teacher after Şemsi Efendi (there were four in total).⁴⁴ Osman Tevfik’s major accomplishment was the journal called *Mütalaa* (1896–1898). Like *Gonca-i Edep*, this journal was also devoted mostly to literature, science, and philosophy. In its first issue, the editor wrote that the primary aim was “to examine and publish pieces of literature that will strengthen our morality and aspects of science that will serve our needs.” The editor appreciates “the age of progress as it unfolds before our eyes . . . and gives strength to our hearts and courage to our thoughts.”⁴⁵ In the next issue, Osman Adil (the son of mayor Hamdi Bey) is reported to have said that he was jubilant over the success of the journal and wished to share this happiness with other Salonicans.⁴⁶ Although *Mütalaa* purported to be apolitical, its overall tone was that of secular “Ottomanism” (*Osmanlıcılık*), as reflected in one of the articles’ concluding sentences: “Long Live Ottomanism!”⁴⁷ İslamoglu prepared an analytical index for the journal, which provides a list of its authors showing their diverse background; there were 192, among whom were Recaizade Ekrem, Cenap Şehabettin, Tevfik Fikret, İsmail Safa, Süleyman Nüzhet, Hüseyin Vassaf, Nigar b. Osman, Leskovikli Rauf, Mehmet Cavid, Hüseyin Cahit, Selanikli Tevfik, Selanikli Nüzhet, and Yekta (daughter of Şemsi Efendi).⁴⁸ In 1897, the Yakubis founded the newspaper *Asır* (1897–1905, later *Yeni Asır*).⁴⁹ It was supported by an important Salonian Judeo-Spanish tabloid, *Epoca*, that was owned by the Levy family, editors of the French language *Journal*

⁴⁴ I am thankful to Nur Yalman, one of the grandsons of Osman Tevfik, for showing me an autographed photo of Ataturk presented to Osman Tevfik, and for sharing his memories of Ataturk. Ataturk’s other Dönme teachers were Nakiyüddin Yücekök (1866–1949), who was a teacher of French in the *rüstîye* (middle school), and Tevfik Kılınççioğlu who was a music teacher.

⁴⁵ *Mütalaa* 1 (1986): 2. I am thankful to Ali Yalman, the grandson of Osman Tevfik, for letting me use the *Mütalaa* collection at his disposal.

⁴⁶ *Mütalaa* 3 (August 18, 1896): 2.

⁴⁷ *Mütalaa* 42 (May 26, 1897): 2.

⁴⁸ Oğuzhan İslamoglu, “Mütalaa Mecmuası: Tahlili Fihrist, İnceleme Metinler,” unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (Karadeniz Technical University, 2000), 34–67.

⁴⁹ *Yeni Asır* was originally established by the Yakubi Abdurrahman Nafiz, Fazlı Necip, and Abdurrahman Arif [Bilgin] and edited by Osman Adil Bey. It moved to Izmir in the early twentieth century and was run by Ali Şevket Bilgin and then Dinç Bilgin, who was also the former owner of the daily *Sabah*. For the history of the newspaper, see Türkmen Parlak, *Yeni Asırın Selanik Yılları* (Izmir: Yeni Asır, 1989).

of *Salonique*.⁵⁰ Early media activities were yet another sign that most of the Yakubis embraced modernization before members of the other two groups.

By the early 1900s, there were journals operated by the Karakaş and Kapancı youth, such as *Çocuk Bahçesi* (A Child's Garden) (January 26, 1905–December 14, 1905; reestablished as *Bahçe* after 1908) and *Kadın* (Woman). The owner of *Çocuk Bahçesi* was Necip Necati (Özeren) who was a literature teacher at the Feyziye School. Some of the contributors such as Ali Ulvi [Elöve], Akif Fevzi [Koyuncu], İsmet [Ulukut], İbrahim İhsan, Rasim Haşmet, and Celal Sahir were prominent people in literary circles.⁵¹ The owner of the journal *Kadın* was Mustafa İbrahim, and its editor was Enis Avni (Aka Gündüz). As discussed later, in this journal, the authors wrote their attacks on the Dönme and Ottoman traditions under female pen names to hide their real identities.

Salonica and Internationalization of the Dönmes

The Dönme social organization and steadily growing financial capital created conducive conditions not only for the generation of cultural capital but also of political capital in the last decades of the nineteenth century. By acquiring high political posts in the municipal and regional governments after the Tanzimat period, the Dönmes, with the collaboration of the Jews, Europeans, and Turks, effectively created a cosmopolitan city. As Mazower notes, “By a strange twist of fate it was the Muslim followers of a Jewish messiah who helped turn late nineteenth century Salonica into the most liberal, progressive and revolutionary city of the empire.”⁵²

Salonica’s star had been rising since the eighteenth century. In 1859, Sultan Abdulmecit (r. 1839–1861) paid a visit to the “empire’s most important and prosperous European city,” a reflection of Salonica’s significance for the Ottomans.⁵³ Next to Istanbul and Izmir, it was the empire’s most important port city, supporting a major fishing industry, overseas commerce, and military and commercial arteries penetrating deep into the Balkan Peninsula. The year 1868 was critical in the history of the city, as this was the year Salonica was granted the right to be an independent municipality. Previously, the city was chiefly run by pashas and *kadis*, aided by guild chiefs, neighborhood headmen, and communal leaders.⁵⁴ In the new system, the elected members of the local government were responsible for urban planning, market control, and public health and welfare. In 1869, Governor Sabri Mehmet Pasha, who

⁵⁰ Cooperman, “Turco-Jewish Relations,” 59.

⁵¹ Rıza Filizok, *Ali Canip'in Hayatı ve Eserleri Üzerinde Bir Araştırma* (İzmir: Ege University Yayınları, 2001), 55.

⁵² Mark Mazower, *Salonica: City of Ghosts; Christians Muslims and Jews (1430–1950)* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 74.

⁵³ Mazower, *Salonica*, 133–136.

⁵⁴ Mazower, *Salonica*, 224.

had carried out an ambitious modernization project in Izmir, came to Salonica and undertook similar projects there. “The Europeanization of space” was achieved through demolishing the city walls, expanding the residential area, and draining pestilent swamps on the outskirts that had contributed negatively to the public health of the city.⁵⁵ Mazower notes that throughout the late nineteenth century, urban growth was bringing down medieval walls across Europe: 1860 in Antwerp and Barcelona, 1870 in Amsterdam, and 1878 in Vienna. The Orient Express (with the support of Baron de Hirsch) and steamships connected Salonica to Europe, so that one could get to Paris in two weeks in the 1860s and in only three days in the 1880s.

This urban reform enabled not only the local Muslims but also Jews, Armenians, and Dönmes to be part of active politics.⁵⁶ Jews in particular were heavily represented in the city councils, since their population had always made up at least half the city’s population. After the Greek War of Independence, the Ottoman Greek community fell from favor with the authorities, a situation that provided new opportunities for the Jews who slowly reclaimed some of their former local and international prestige. “Enlightened” and mostly Marrano-origin Jewish families, such as the Allatinis, the Nehamas, the Fernandeses, the Modianos, and the Perreras, all had strong connections with their European counterparts and all contributed to this rebirth. After the Armenian rebellions and massacres in the 1890s, the Ottoman state grew even more suspicious of religious and ethnic minorities who might threaten the territorial or religious integrity of the state. In this nationalist milieu, apolitical Jews remained the most “loyal” subjects in the eyes of Ottoman officials. In that time period, the Jews turned from “subjects” to modern “citizens” in the full sense of the term, and as members of a “model community” in Cohen’s term, they played increasingly important roles in the economic and political life of the empire, walking carefully between Ottoman expectations of them and their “ambivalent” responses to these officials.⁵⁷

While the Jews were the predominant force in Salonica’s economic scene, the Dönmes were richer and, unlike the Jews, eligible to hold important political posts that were reserved for Muslims only. Jews and Christians could be rich, but they could not become mayors, generals, governors, and high officials. As Gounaris shows, the richest Muslims of the city were the Dönmes, who had been in trade for centuries. Along with the Jews, the Dönmes also controlled the Salonica Chamber of Commerce.⁵⁸ The Dönmes were effective in commerce not only in Salonica but also in Istanbul.⁵⁹ When the Tanzimat

⁵⁵ Mazower, *Salonica*, 225.

⁵⁶ Baer, *The Donme*, 84–90.

⁵⁷ Julia Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), introduction.

⁵⁸ Basil C. Gounaris, “Selanik” in *Doğu Akdenizde Liman Kentleri*, ed. Donald Quataert (Istanbul: TTV, 1994), xx.

⁵⁹ Mehmet Rauf, *İtihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, 85–88.

reforms created new political positions, it was the educated Dönmes who often filled them, expanding their wealth and power in the city and the hinterlands. It was not a coincidence that Dönme schools were established near the government building, where community members served at different times as mayors, clerks, accountants, and customs officers. In explaining their wealth, Bent claims that the Dönmes were industrious people who worked seven days a week, while the Jews, Muslims, and Christians all took at least one “religious” day off per week.⁶⁰

The Dönmes’ financial, cultural, and political impact on the city became more visible with the election of the Yakubi mayor Ahmet Hamdi Bey (1893–1902). Hamdi was the son of a tax farmer, Osman Efendi, and the father of Osman Adil, who was the Salonica mayor after his father.⁶¹ After the great fire of 1890, Hamdi literally turned Salonica into a prosperous, healthy, and lively metropolis. He expanded the city by building a new neighborhood for the wealthy called Hamidiye, with large boulevards, lights, pavement, and horse-drawn (later, electric) tramways. The houses and public places were furnished with gas lighting and running water.⁶² The name Hamidiye was chosen after Sultan Abdulhamit’s name, but ironically also after the mayor’s own name. The volume of international trade in the city grew so large that by 1900–1901, on average, 6,000 ships were entering the port annually.⁶³ Starting in 1899, imports doubled exports in volume, a ratio that continued until the end of the Ottoman era.⁶⁴ Hamdi’s legacy in the city was so deep that his group, the Yakubis, came to be known also as Hamdi Beyler, a name after the legendary Yakubi mayor of Salonica.

The Ottoman government and Hamdi Bey commissioned Italian architect Vitaliano Poselli to construct a number of new buildings in Salonica. Similar to the architect Antonin Gaudí of Barcelona, Poselli designed several masterpieces for Salonica, including schools, villas, apartments, bank buildings, a hospital, a post office, a government building, a fire department, a church, a synagogue, and a mosque.⁶⁵

The New Mosque (Yeni Cami) in the Hamidiye neighborhood (see Figure 7.4) was the ultimate example of a “visible” Dönme institution, something reflecting the new openness of both Dönme and Salonican society. This conspicuous temple was mostly funded by prominent Yakubis such as Field Marshall Hacı Mehmet Hayri Pasha, Major Ali Salhi, and Haji Agha of

⁶⁰ Bent, “A Peculiar People,” 26.

⁶¹ Akyalçın, “Les Sabbatéens Salomiciens,” 164–182.

⁶² About Hamdi Bey’s achievements, see Meropi Anastassiadou, *Selanik, 1830–1912* (Istanbul: TTV, 2001), 150–154.

⁶³ Cooperman, “Turco-Jewish Relations,” 183.

⁶⁴ Cooperman, “Turco-Jewish Relations,” 180–184.

⁶⁵ For more about his buildings, see Vassilis Colonas, “Vitaliano Poselli: An Italian Architect in Thessaloniki,” *Environmental Design* (1990): 162–171.



FIGURE 7.4 Yeni Cami (New Mosque), Salonica. Copyright by Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki City, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports.

Seres.⁶⁶ This unconventional building was a symbolic, visible manifestation of the eclectic Dönme identity. Colonas elegantly describes its style:

. . . a domed neo-Renaissance villa, with windows framed in the style of late Habsburg Orientalism and pillars which flank the entrance supporting a solid horse-shoe arch straight out of Moorish Spain. Complete with sundial and clock tower, the Yeni Djami sums up the extraordinary blending of influences—Islamic and European, Art Nouveau meets a neo-Baroque Alhamra, with a discreet hint of the ancestral faith in the star of David patterns cut into the upper-floor balconies—which made up the *Maamins'* world.⁶⁷

One wonders why the Dönmes built a mosque in an age when the new generation was experiencing a period of intense secularization and modernization. As Baer suggests, Dönmes prayed in the new mosque like other Muslims but added additional Dönme prayers and rituals, just as they did at their private

⁶⁶ Elcin Macar, "Selanik Dönmezinin Camisi," *Tarih ve Toplum* (December, 1997): 28–29.

⁶⁷ Cited in Mazower, *Salonica*, 76.

burial services.⁶⁸ Could we apply this argument to all the Dönme subgroups? From other sources we learn that only a few “chosen” Dönmes attended the mosques or went on the pilgrimage to Mecca with the intent of being seen to carry out their Islamic duties, as required by the Eighteen Commandments. The Yakubis were the most diligent in complying with Islamic practices. A new neighborhood could not be built without a mosque in it. Therefore, they built mosques not necessarily because of greater Islamic piety but out of pragmatic necessity, for they also needed a place to conduct their own prayers, and most important, to conduct funeral ceremonies. Decorating inside and outside of the mosque with stars of David, or choosing Quranic verse 2: 144 (turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque) rather than classical verse 3:37 (whoever enters into this *mihrab*), written on the prayer niche, were some attempt to inscribe the Dönme distinctiveness on this iconic building.⁶⁹

As tensions eased among the liberated members of the other groups, we could assume that the mosque was used by other Dönmes as well, as was the case in the Saatli and Kadi Abdullah mosques in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, and the Teşvikiye mosque in Istanbul between the 1920s and the 1980s. Even if the mosques were attended by members of different groups, however, there was undoubtedly opposition to this practice among orthodox members of the groups who continued to pray or meet in their “secret” temples.

Portraying Dönmes’ obedience to Islamic practices in their private lives, Ayaşlı tells a story about Hamdi Bey. Ayaşlı’s grandfather Ali Rıza Pasha was appointed to a post in Salonica. Upon arrival at the train station, the family was greeted by Hamdi Bey, who insisted that the newcomers stay in his house for few days. At the house, when prayer time approached, the lady guests asked to have prayer rugs. A panic broke out, since the family did not have a prayer rug. A servant was hastily dispatched to Hamdi Bey, who was still in his office. He immediately sent the servant to purchase a dozen prayer rugs and sent them home. During the prayer, Dönme ladies had been clumsily imitating the guests, since they did not know how to pray.⁷⁰ One could question the veracity of this story, but it certainly remains within the realm of possibility, since Dönme women were not obliged to learn the language or practices of Islam to the same extent as the men, who in Ottoman society had a more public role to play. In describing the discrepancy between the private and public lives of Dönme women in the 1880s, Garnett provides us with dozens of pictures of

⁶⁸ Baer *The Dönme*, 40.

⁶⁹ Choosing this verse is not coincidental since it refers to the incident when the Muslims changed their direction of the prayer (*kibla*) from Jerusalem to Mecca. For history and symbolisms of the New Mosque, see Macar, “Selanik Dönmemelerinin Camisi,” and Baer, *The Dönme*, 39–41.

⁷⁰ Münevver Ayaşlı, *Dersaadet* (Istanbul: Bedir, 1993), 170–173. Ahmed Safi tells another story about the Dönmes’ “suspicious” Islamic practices. The story has it that Recep Efendi, the imam from Istanbul, used to be invited to Salonica every year to lead prayers at Ramadan. At some point, the imam found out that the congregation was not a regular one, and they had not been following him properly during the prayer. Safi, *Dönmeler Adeti*, 31.

Dönme women dressed in fashionable European styles and tells that “out of doors, the Dönme women wear the Turkish cloak and veil, but appear to be less restricted in their intercourse with strangers than *bona-fide* Moslems. . . . One may, for instance, see them divested of their outdoor garb, at Jewish weddings, exposed to the gaze of dozens of the other sex.”⁷¹

In developing the city, Hamdi Bey received several governmental concessions, including the exclusive right to operate the city’s water and gas operations (the Ottoman Water Company and Ottoman Gas Company), to build tramway infrastructure (Ottoman Tramway Company of Salonica), and to make the Vardar River navigable for transportation.⁷² Most of the financing was secured from Belgian companies. As a result of close connections with the Belgians, by 1900, Hamdi Bey had moved a part of his family to Brussels, where he too would eventually live out his last days.⁷³

In the second half of the nineteenth century, concessions and money lending were an integral part of the colonial strategy for acquiring control over various Middle Eastern countries. Rather than direct colonization as in the cases of Latin America or Africa, colonial powers gave loans to the governments of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Iran who wished to modernize or reform their countries. Another strategy was to directly engage in building and operating industries—such as drilling the oil fields and constructing railroads and waterways—in return for which symbolic rents were paid to the ruling elite. England’s D’Arcy Oil agreement with Iran and the Suez Canal agreement with Egypt are prime examples of this practice. In addition to the Belgians, British, French, and German companies also invested in the empire. Most of the time, however, the borrowers found themselves unable to pay back the loans, and in place of payment they gave the lenders even more concessions to extract natural resources. For example, after the Ottoman loan default in 1881, oversight of the empire’s tobacco cultivation and sales passed to a Franco-German company called the Regie Cointeressee de Tabaco de l’Empire Ottoman, which became the largest foreign investor in the empire. The Regie, as it was known (it was nationalized in 1925 and became Tekel), was to share the profits it derived from local tobacco sales with the Ottoman Treasury on an equal basis.

After Hamdi Bey, the Dönmes mayors were Yakubi (?) Ahmet Hulusi Bey (1902–1906),⁷⁴ Kapancı Ahmet (1906–1909), Hamdi Bey’s son Osman Adil (1909–1912), and Hamdi Bey’s nephew Osman Sait [Somersan] (1912–1916 and 1920–1922); they ran the city with the help of Jews and Turks until its loss to

⁷¹ Garnett, *Women of Turkey*, 106.

⁷² Baer, *The Dönme*, 89.

⁷³ His son, Osman Sait, moved with his family to Turkey in 1924. His wife, Safiye Said Somersan, died in 1962, and his son, attorney Danis Sait Somersan, died in 1975. Both of them were buried in the Feriköy cemetery.

⁷⁴ After 1906, Ahmet Hulusi was appointed chief operating officer of the Şirket-i Hayriye Shipping Company. *Journal de Selanique*, December 6, 1906.

the Greeks. It is interesting to note that Osman Sait kept his post during the early years of Greek rule. In 1905, the municipal council consisted of Ahmet Hulusi, Haci Lahia Efendi, Tevfik Bey, Cemal Bey, Stephan Datı Efendi, and Nehema Mallah Efendi.⁷⁵ In 1906, the council was composed of Mehmet Kapancı, Osman Dervish, Jacob Cazes, and Jacob Modiano.⁷⁶ The *Journal de Salonique* was full of praise for Ahmet Hulusi and Osman Adil, stating, for example, that Osman Adil “has traveled much, seen much and retained much. He is imbued with progressive ideas.”⁷⁷ In the municipal election of 1909, out of the twelve council members, the six who received the highest votes were Jews and Dönmes, including Isaac Florentin, Ahmet Rakun Efendi, Osman Sait, and Kibarzade Abdurrahman.⁷⁸

Several other important Dönme families contributed to the transformation of the city into a Dönme city-state. The tobacco, textile, and silk businesses were almost entirely in their hands. One of the major players was undoubtedly the well-known Kapancı family, whose members were instrumental in the economic, cultural, and political life of the city for centuries. Due to the power of the family, the subsect to which they belonged, which had originally been known as the Kavayeros or İzmirli, was increasingly known simply as “the Kapancıs.” Perhaps the most influential members of the family were the brothers Mehmet (1839–1925) and Ahmet Kapancı. Among the richest men of the city, Mehmet served as head of the Chamber of Commerce and had business interests in textiles, tobacco, and banking. Ahmed ran the Ottoman Textile and Fez Company and served as mayor. The brothers owned the most conspicuous villas in the new Hamidiye neighborhood (Figure 7.5). Other family members were also quite successful merchants and manufacturers with very large international trading networks. Ahmet’s son Faiz ran textile factories, and Mehmet’s son Namık owned banking houses.⁷⁹ Several family pictures from the period, shown to me by different Kapancı descendants, indicate that they had extensive family and business connections in Paris, Zurich, Vienna, Hamburg, Brussels, Manchester, and even Buenos Aires. For example, Kapancı Duhani Hasan Akif’s company had branches in Austria, Belgium, Germany, and England.⁸⁰ Another Kapancı, Kazım Emin Bey, who was the founder of TURMAC (Turkish Macedonian Tobacco Company), had branches all over Europe in the 1920s. These liberated Dönmes were ready to do business with everyone. For example, a failed Jewish business in 1897 was

⁷⁵ *Journal de Selanique*, January 4, 1906.

⁷⁶ Cooperman, *Turco-Jewish Relations*, 214.

⁷⁷ Cooperman, *Turco-Jewish Relations*, 216.

⁷⁸ Cooperman, *Turco-Jewish Relations*, 220.

⁷⁹ For more on Dönme business and trade, see Baer, *The Dönme*, 65–80.

⁸⁰ Okşan Özferendeci, “Tütüncü Hasan Akif Ailesi,” *Album* (April 1998): 100–109. I am also thankful to Esin Eden, who is one of the relatives of the Tütüncü family, for sharing some of her family stories with me.



FIGURE 7.5 Villa Kapandji, Salonica, 1900s. Courtesy of ELIA Archives, Thessaloniki.

taken over by Dönmes Ethem Hasan Akif Efendi and Dervish Efendi and another Jewish merchant, Jacob Cazes.⁸¹

Another important family was the Kapancı Bezmens, who ran an international textile company in Salonica and also started the textile industry in the early Turkish Republic. Refik Recep Bey and his son (and a classmate of Atatürk) Halil Ali Bezman owned a chain of stores in European countries and even Argentina by the early twentieth century.⁸² One of the Bezmens' relatives, the Telcis, excelled in the silk business. Mentioning the names of few Dönmes in 1909, Hartmann refers to Sami Telci as "the silk merchant and one of the richest Dönmes of Salonica."⁸³

The Karakaş (the group was called by this name after the turn of the century), the İpekcis, the Kibarzades, the Şamlıs, and the Dilbers were prominent Karakaş families who were merchants and industrialists of not only Ottoman Salonica but also of the early Turkish Republic.

As Salonica was in the process of its own transformation, the empire as a whole had been going through a series of challenges: the Christian populations of modern-day Romania, Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria were all seeking some level of independence with the help of the great powers. The hinterland was often in revolt. At the negotiations for the Treaty of Berlin

⁸¹ Cited in Cooperman, *Turco-Jewish Relations*, 215.

⁸² I am thankful to Necdet Bezman and late Pamir Bezman for sharing some of their family stories with me.

⁸³ Hartmann, *Der Islamische Orient*, 185.

(1878) ending the conflict among the United Kingdom, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, the political map of the Balkans was redrawn to the Ottomans' detriment. Several subsequent revolts and wars in the border areas continued to shake the empire's stability. Despite all the economic and political hardship around it, Salonica continued to experience a period of relative prosperity and peace. European-style cafes, restaurants, bars, and hotels were filled with locals and tourists, all dressed in European styles. Hundreds of surviving photographs from the early 1900s testify to the wealth, elegance, and conspicuous consumption in the city. As shown by Naar, with the increased urban population (from 70,000 people to 150,000 people), industrialization, and new economic opportunities, by the turn of the century Jews came to constitute close to half of the city residents.⁸⁴ Visiting the city in 1908, even Ahmed Safi, a vocal critic of the Dönmes, was shocked by seeing that the city had been "dramatically developed" and "completely changed" since the last time he had visited it in 1879.⁸⁵

In this bustling, cosmopolitan environment, new professions and patterns of behavior were to replace the old ones. Previously, in addition to theological differences, the Dönmes also had been largely distinct from each other in their professions, costumes, and even hair and grooming styles. The Yakubis were mostly officials and bureaucrats due to their knowledge of Ottoman Turkish. They looked down on the other subsects as lower class and preferred to keep their interactions with them to a minimum. They generally shaved their heads and wore shoes without heels. Their women separated their hair into thin curls and wore yellow shoes and a long, black body-length coat known as a *feradjeh*. As denoted by their other name (Kavayero, like the Italian *cavagliero* or Spanish *cavallero*), the Kapancıs considered themselves enlightened aristocrats. This subsect produced large and middle-scale merchants and professionals such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, veterinarians, and artisans. They also monopolized the barbering profession in the city. Their men shaved their beards but not their heads. The Karakaş mostly tended to be poor artisans, cobblers, peddlers, stocking weavers, butchers, and porters. But these generalizations began to change at the end of the nineteenth century, not in the 1920s, as Scholem argued.⁸⁶ For example, the position of the Karakaş improved immensely at the turn of the century thanks to the textile and silk businesses as seen in the case of the İpekcis. Within the subsects, the members were also divided along class lines. For example, among the Yakubis, the "elite" and "commoners" had limited interaction.⁸⁷ The formation of an "aristocracy" also occurred in other subsects; even today, the rich

⁸⁴ Devin Naar, "From the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans' to the *Goldene Medina*: Jewish Immigration from Salonika to the United States," *American Jewish History* 93: 4 (2007): 435–476.

⁸⁵ Safi, *Dönmeler Adeti*, 34.

⁸⁶ Scholem, "The Crypto-Jewish Sect of the Dönme," 155.

⁸⁷ Yalman, "Tarihin Esrarengiz Sayfasi."

are buried in the Zincirlikuyu cemetery, the others are buried in the Feriköy cemetery.

Alternative Brotherhoods: Dönmes as Sufis and Freemasons

From the earliest days the Dönmes attended Sufi lodges for both pragmatic and religious reasons. Once masonic lodges began to appear in Salonica at the end of the nineteenth century, the assimilated ones increasingly shifted their attendance to this new type of brotherhood. From a strictly orthodox Dönme point of view, it was an abomination to be a member of another brotherhood in which you share your “secrets” with new brothers. Despite the ban, however, some Dönmes attended both.

To address how the Dönmes preserved their enigmatic identity throughout the centuries, in my previous works, I argued that the Sufi world provided them with a safe spiritual haven where they created a hybrid Kabbala-Sufi identity.⁸⁸ Similar arguments are still put forward in several studies.⁸⁹ However, based on the written and oral sources, I now think that not all the Dönmes chose this path, and therefore, the impact of Sufism on the Dönme existence was not as great as we originally thought. The majority of Dönme men and almost all Dönme women kept their enigmatic identity alive by following the principles of the Neo-Lurianic Dönme Kabbala. Therefore, rather than forming a new “syncretic” religion that combined elements from Kabbala and Sufism, they created a meta-religion within a post-messianic Jewish framework, which was different from all the existing religions. This meta-religion was inherently, in Kafadar’s terminology, meta-doxic, a state of being beyond all kinds of “doxies.”⁹⁰ Despite the rabbinical ban, Sabbateanism and its failure strongly encouraged the study of Kabbala among the Ottoman Jews rather than restraining it, as had occurred in Western Europe.⁹¹ The outstanding example of this trend was the book *Hemdat Yamim* that was also most likely studied by the Dönmes along with their own mystical texts.

Sabbatai’s interest in Sufism is well known. Friedlander claimed that the notion of *takiyye* was of Shi'a origin, and that it was transferred to the Sabbatean culture via Sufism.⁹² Likewise, Scholem asserts that “the justification of their *takiyye* may as easily be considered a parallel to the Sufi conceptions as the result of the Sufi-Bektashi influence.”⁹³ Elqayam goes even further and claims that “Sevi’s utterances of the Ineffable Name, as well as

⁸⁸ Cengiz Sisman, *Sabatay Sevi ve Sabataycılar* (Ankara: Asina, 2008), 74–75.

⁸⁹ For example, see Baer, *The Dönme*, 5–7, 16, 243.

⁹⁰ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 76.

⁹¹ Barnai, “From Sabbateanism to Modernization,” 75.

⁹² Israel Friedlander, “Shitic Influence in Judaism,” *JQR* (1911–1912): 235–300.

⁹³ Scholem, “The Crypto-Jewish,” 153.

his exclamation ‘Beside me there is no God’ marks him as a Sufi mystic, like Al-Bistami and Al-Halaj.” Rapoport draws some parallels between Sabbateanism and the Bektashis in their liberal treatment of women.⁹⁴ Baer argues that their syncretic religion was a spiritual synthesis based on two religions that incorporated elements of Kabbala and Sufism.⁹⁵ All of these arguments are partly true, since during their formative period, the Sabbatean communities borrowed some “forms” from Sufi practices such as the master-disciple relationship, *takiyye* (dissimulation), and *zikr* (mystical recitation). But, as their numerous prayer and hymns books, mystical texts, and oral traditions suggest, Dönme Kabbala have remained essentially within the framework of the post-messianic Jewish mysticism. I agree with Bitek, who said that one could detect the effect of Sufism on Sabbateanism on the surface, but in its core it remained a branch of Jewish mysticism.⁹⁶ To another contemporary Dönme elder, Islamic and Sufi elements became part of Sabbateanism as long as they did not contradict the main Sabbatean tenets.⁹⁷

Although limited, the interaction and overlapping of Sufi and Kabbala practices resulted in creative hybrids. After all, Salonica was famous for its Sufis and its Sufi lodges, and some Donmes developed a genuine interest in Sufism.⁹⁸ As discussed before, the Harvard manuscript containing Dönme hymns testifies to the level of interaction already happening in the middle of the eighteenth century. An examination of the manuscript shows that the Ottoman couplets and distiches, which set the hymns’ melodic tones, were not random but learned choices whose meaning reflects the devotional Sephardic hymns, expressed as a yearning for the beloved, God, or the messiah.⁹⁹ However, this does not necessarily mean that the Sufi content went much beyond the form in the Dönme liturgy.

The Dönmes’ pragmatic interest in unorthodox Sufi orders was not coincidental. As Salonica was located geographically on the outer limits of central governmental authority, the unorthodox Sufis were likewise positioned on the margins of the central religious authority. Especially the Melamis (literally “condemned”) and Bektashis were notorious for their gnostic and antinomian tendencies. In these lodges, the Dönmes could maintain their beliefs and practices without being harassed by the orthodox Islamic authorities. Also, the early Sabbateans believed that other religions could also contain “sparks” of the Truth, and therefore it was not a bad idea to penetrate the secrets of

⁹⁴ Rapoport, *Women and Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi*, 15–56.

⁹⁵ Baer, *The Dönme*, 17; also 5–7 and 243.

⁹⁶ Personal communication with Haluk Bitek, summer 2010.

⁹⁷ Personal communication with a contemporary Dönme, summer 2012.

⁹⁸ For example, Ekrem Ayverdi mentions the existence of forty different lodges, belonging to different orthodox and un-orthodox Sufi orders in the nineteenth century. See his, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri*, vol 4: *Bulgaristan Yunanistan, Arnavutluk* (İstanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1982), IV: 253–267.

⁹⁹ Cengiz Sisman, “Dönme Şarkı ve İlahileri,” *Tarih ve Toplum* (Temmuz 2002): 12–15.

other religions. Regardless of whether they were Sufis or not, however, all the Dönme males had to attend Friday prayers and Islamic high-holiday prayers in mosques, since these were obligatory rituals for Muslim males. Therefore, the Dönme knowledge of Islam and Sufism could also stem from hearing these sermons and prayers.

In time, Yakubis developed an interest primarily in the Melami Sufis, Kapancıs mainly in the Mevlevi Sufis, and the Karakaş mainly in the Bektashi Sufis. A few attended other Sufi orders, including the Nakşibendiyye. But we do not know when and how many of them developed inclinations toward particular orders. The Bektashi order, which had been historically associated with the Janissaries, was abolished in 1826; their lodges, including the ones in Salonica, were closed and their members were persecuted and even executed.¹⁰⁰ Because of that, it was difficult to publicly remain a Bektashi until the end of the Tanzimat period, after which the pressure on them was slowly lifted.¹⁰¹

The first known Dönme Melamis were the students of Nur al-Arabi (d.1888),¹⁰² Ali Örfi Efendi, Usturumcalı Hacı Süleyman Bey, and Osman Zevki Efendi, all of whom served as dervishes and sheikhs in different lodges in the Balkans. The first known Dönme Mevlevi dervish (later, the sheikh) was Karakaş İshak Efendi/Dede, who was affiliated with a sufi convent, Melevihane in 1825.¹⁰³ Due to his erudition in mysticism, Ishak Efendi is said to have been a Sufi sheikh and organ (rabbi) of the Dönme community at the same time.¹⁰⁴ Among those Dönmes who were actively involved in Sufi orders, Mehmed Esad Dede (1843–1914) was perhaps the most interesting.¹⁰⁵ He was born to the family of “Avdeti” Hanuş Hanım and Receb Efendi (Paşarel) Bey, a merchant and one of the key figures in establishing the Terakki schools. He had one sister and three brothers: Emin Receb, who married a British woman and died in Manchester; Refik Receb; and İsmail Receb (1853–1913), who also married a British woman and died in England. All the brothers were in the textile business.¹⁰⁶ Note that marrying outsiders had already started in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mehmet Esat received his early

¹⁰⁰ The Bektashi convents, such as the Kara Baba Tekkesi, located at the center of Salonica, and Bayezid Baba Tekkesi, located in Babaköy, near Salonica, were closed and their properties were confiscated. For the fate of other Bektashi convents in the Balkans, see BOA, MAD, # 9771.

¹⁰¹ İlber Ortaylı, “Tarikatlar ve Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Yönetimi,” OTAM 6 (1995): 281–287.

¹⁰² About Nur al-Arabi and the Melamis, see Abdulkâbir Gölpinarlı, *Melamilik ve Melamiler* (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931). In the nineteenth century, there were two Melami convents in Salonica, one of which was headed by Örfi Dede. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultan*, II: 525.

¹⁰³ Stavroulakis, *Jews and Dervishes*, 72. There is also a Dönme tradition, claiming that that Hayatizade Emin Efendi, who was the grandson of Hayatizade Mustafa Efendi and served as a sheikhulislam in 1748, was a Sabbatean believer.

¹⁰⁴ He seems to have settled in Izmir after the population exchange, but I was not able to confirm this. His descendants continue to be active in the Sufi lodges, including his grandson, the famous Turkish diplomat, Emre Gönensay.

¹⁰⁵ For his life, see Hüseyin Vassaf, *Esadname* (Süleymaniye Library. Ms. Yazma Bağışlar, 2324/2), 105–114; and Vassaf, *Sefinet ul Evliya* (İstanbul), I: 329–332.

¹⁰⁶ Vassaf, *Esadname*, 106.

education from a Dönme teacher. According to the account that he shared with his students, Esat had a dream during his childhood that changed the course of his life. In the dream, he saw himself as having fallen into a dark pit. The prophet Muhammed came and rescued him from the pit, upon which he was “ennobled with the glory of Islam.” He was subsequently initiated into the Mevlevi order, and then (1864) sought his fortune in Istanbul where he became one of the most influential Mevlevi sheikhs at the turn of the twentieth century. He was appointed the sheikh of the Yenikapı lodge and subsequently the Kasımpaşa Melevihane. Sharing this dream with his students in his advanced age, Mehmet Esat seems to have wanted to set the record straight about himself, that he “really” converted to Islam. Some of his students were Hüseyin Vassaf, Ahmed Avni Konuk, Mehmed Akif Ersoy, and Tahir ül-Mevlevi. He taught poetry, Arabic, and Persian in different mosques and *madrasas*, and wrote extensive commentaries on Ibn Arabî’s *Fusus’l Hikem* and Rumi’s *Mesnevi*, and came to be known as Mesnevihan (the one who reads and explicates *Mesnevi*).¹⁰⁷ Not surprisingly, his name was included not only among the holy men (*evliya*) of the order but also in the bibliographical dictionaries of religious scholars (*ulema*), since he attended *madrasas* both in Salonica and Istanbul.¹⁰⁸ Mehmet Esat never disconnected from his family. One of the descendants of his family, Pamir Bezmen, relates that Esat continued to pay monthly visits to the office of his grandfather, Halil Ali Bezmen, to receive his “pocket money.”¹⁰⁹

The Kapancıs’ connection to the Mevlevis became more evident at the turn of the century. The children of the Mevlevi sheikhs, for instance, received free education at the Terakki schools, and the sheikhs appeared in their opening ceremonies.¹¹⁰ One could suspect that these sheikhs were Dönme Mevlevis as well. We also see several Kapancı musicians such as Selanikli Oudi Ahmet Bey (1868–1927) and Faiz Kapancı, who actually played in the Melevihane, and composed hundreds of songs.¹¹¹ Hasan Akif’s descendant Esin Eden makes frequent allusions to her families’ connection to the Mevlevis. Yıldız Sertel tells how her grandfather Nazmi Efendi enjoyed participating in Melevi ceremonies.¹¹² And Haluk Bitek, in our conversations, has always said how much he enjoyed Melevi philosophy and way of life.

¹⁰⁷ İbnu'l Emin Kemal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri* (İstanbul: Orhaniye Matbaası, 1942), 326.

¹⁰⁸ Sadık Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması* (İstanbul: Büyükşehir Belediyesi), 131–132.

¹⁰⁹ Mehmet Esat’s niece Vedia (Refik Recep’s daughter) was married to Halil Ali Bezmen, and that made Mehmet Esat the great-uncle of the famous Bezmen family. See Pamir Bezmen, “Mevlevi Şair Yazar Mesnevihan Mehmet Esat Dede,” *Antik & Dekor* 23 (1994): 138–143. Halil Ali and Vedia Bezmens’ children were Refik (married to Atiye; two children: Emine and Vedia), Fuat (married to Fatma; four children: Halil, Nazim, Turgut, and Necdet), and Şermin (married to Mehmet Cazim; one child: Pamir).

¹¹⁰ Alkan, *Terakki Vakfi ve Terakki Okulları*, 50.

¹¹¹ For the other Melevi musicians, see Baer, *The Dönme*, 200.

¹¹² Yıldız Sertel, *Annen: Sabiha Sertel Kimdi?* (İstanbul: Belge, 2001), 18.

Likewise, we see several Dönmes prominent among the Bektashis at the end of the twentieth century, for Bektashi lodges functioned as a secret headquarters for the Ottoman dissenters. In those years, many of the Sufi orders that were out of favor with the sultan became strong, even if secret, supporters of the Young Turks.¹¹³ This was also the time when several Bektashis and Dönmes became members of the newly emerging masonic lodges, principally in Salonica.

With the introduction of Freemasonry into the Ottoman Empire (and, with it, masonic lodges) in the 1860s, the Dönmes found a new venue where they could express their ideas and share a bond with new people, a bond that could transcend religious and ethnic boundaries. It was also the time when the Dönme “emancipation” was already in the making. For Slouch, the Dönmes’ religion was the cause of their evolution into free thinkers, and as a result of their beliefs, their education, and their wealth, they were in a prime position to be a revolutionary and progressive force in the city.¹¹⁴

Freemasons had been operating in the Ottoman domains since the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth century, their activities increased significantly. By the turn of the twentieth century, “there were 11 English, 7 Scottish, 2 Irish, 1 Polish, 2 Spanish, 5 German, 15 Italian, 2 Greek, 6 French, 1 Hungarian lodges plus a few chapters attached to the English, Scottish and Irish lodges in Istanbul, Izmir and Thessalonica alone.”¹¹⁵ Until the 1860s, the lodges were exclusively for foreigners. The Ottomans who became Masons in those days would have been initiated during their stays in Europe. Once the lodges opened their doors to Ottoman subjects in Turkey, several important figures became Freemasons. Among them were three of Sultan Abdulmecit’s sons—Prince Murat (later Sultan Murat V) and two of his brothers, Nurettin and Kemalettin (initiated in the French Lodge Prodos)—Young Ottoman leader Namik Kemal, CUP leader (and subsequent interior minister) Talat Bey, Rıza Tevfik, and Ahmet Midhat. A key figure in this process was Cleanthi Scalieri, an Istanbul-born Greek, who was initiated into the French Masonic Lodge of the Ottoman Capital, Le Union d’Orient, in 1865. Scalieri devoted himself to the establishment of a new Byzantine state that could unite Turks and Greeks under the leadership of an enlightened Ottoman sultan. When the Ottomans encountered Freemasonry it did not feel strange, for its structure and symbolism had some commonalities with the Sufi orders, especially with Bektashis. Using this opportunity to their advantage, the Masons used Sufi terminology in translating masonic handbooks and principles into Turkish.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Hanoğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 168.

¹¹⁴ Slouch, “Les Deunmeh,” 483.

¹¹⁵ Official website of the Turkish Freemasonry (<http://eng.mason.org.tr>).

¹¹⁶ On the relationship among the Bektashis, Melamis, and Freemasons, see Thierry Zarcone, *Secret et Sociétés Secrètes en Islam* (Milano: Arché, 2002), 50–59. The Tarikat-i Selahiyye tried to unite the Bektashi and masonic traditions in a Sufi order. See Zarcone, *Secret et Sociétés Secrètes*, 131–155; and Hanoğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 49–58.

The activities of Scalieri and the Freemasons led, by a near coup, to the enthronement of Murat V in 1876. But he was deposed three months later because of mental illness and replaced by his brother Abdülhamit II. Despite the close scrutiny of Abdülhamit, who saw their lodges as a “source of sedition,” the Freemasons became very active among the Young Turks and the CUP.¹¹⁷ The first exclusively Ottoman masonic lodge, the Macedonia Risorta, was opened in Salonica in 1895. Following the Italian masonic rite, the Risorta was headed by a Jewish attorney, Emmanuel Carasso (Emanuel Karasu), who was also a leading member of the CUP’s Salonica branch. Seeking similar social and political goals, a number of “liberated” Ottoman Jewish, Christian, Turkish, and Dönme dissenters joined the lodge because of a special bond of brotherhood, outside of their religious and ethnic communities. This was also one of the outcomes of a new non-religious, non-ethnic Ottoman identity that had been in the making since the 1850s. Due to Carasso’s influence, the lodge opened its doors to the CUP, who exploited the lodge’s foreign affiliation (and with it, its extraterritorial status) to hold their secret meetings and keep their archives.¹¹⁸

A few years later (1904), another lodge, the French-obedience Veritas followed suit. Almost all of the members of the CUP were either members of the Macedonia Risorta or the Veritas.¹¹⁹ For example, the Dönmes such as Fazlı Necip, Faik Nüzhet [Terem], Osman Adil, Mehmed Cavid, Talat İsmail, Mehmet Server (a judge in the Salonica commercial court), and Tevfik Ehat were members of the Veritas.¹²⁰ In 1908, out of 150 Veritas members, there were 129 Jews, and 15 Muslims/Dönmes. Other members of these two lodges were Talat Bey (later pasha), Mithat Şükrü [Bleda], Cemal (later pasha), and Jewish Moiz Kohen (later assumed a Turkish name, Tekinalp, who was a native of Serez, champion of Turkish nationalism, a member of CUP, and Salonica delegate in the World Zionist Congress in Hamburg in 1909). Celal Dervish, Sabiha Sertel’s brother, was a member of L’Avenir de l’Orient.¹²¹ Cooperman mentions fifteen more Dönme Freemasons, including five governmental officials, two judges, two merchants, and a banker.¹²² In his memoirs, Rıza Nur, though exageratingly, claims that all of the Muslims in the Istanbul lodges were Dönmes.¹²³

Under the influence of “nationalization,” the Ottomans opened their independent lodge right after the 1908 Revolution. Named Le Grand Orient

¹¹⁷ Hanoğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 35–41.

¹¹⁸ Paul Dumont, “La Franc-Maçonnerie d’obéissance Française à Salonique au Début du XXe Siècle,” *Turcica* 16 (1984): 65–94, 74.

¹¹⁹ Şükrü Hanoğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 212.

¹²⁰ Dumont, “La Franc-Maçonnerie,” 73.

¹²¹ Dumont, “La Franc-Maçonnerie,” 71.

¹²² Cooperman, *Turco-Jewish Relations*, 302.

¹²³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hayatlarım* (İstanbul: Altındağ, 1967), I:260.

Ottoman, and headed by Talat Bey, this lodge could not obtain recognition from any of the international masonic organizations, but it continued its activities as an “irregular” lodge for many years. Le Grand Orient also had many Dönme members. Referring to the impact of the Freemasons on politics through CUP, Zarcone exaggeratedly calls the Ottoman Empire between 1908 and 1918 “the Masonic State.”¹²⁴ On the opposite side, I believe that Hanioglu downplays the role of Freemasonry when he claims that their initial assistance was invaluable to the CUP, but they had no role in actually shaping CUP policies.¹²⁵ As their numbers and political power grew, hostility toward them increased so much that in later decades, conspiracy lovers claimed that Masons, Jews, and Dönmes were all part of the same cabal, that they became instrumental in collapsing the Ottoman Empire.¹²⁶

From Salonica to Empire: Dönmes as Revolutionary Young Turks

The Young Turks and the CUP (Committee for Union and Progress) were the main oppositional forces against the Ottoman monarchy, more specifically against Abdülhamit II, who closed the parliament of 1876 and ruled the empire with an increasingly repressive hand for more than thirty years. Established in 1889, the CUP was the organizational embodiment of the Young Turk ideals. The Dönmes were so active in their opposition to the sultan that the Salonican branch of the CUP was under virtual domination by the emancipated Dönmes.¹²⁷ At one point the Dönmes were the only group active in the Young Turk movement in Salonica.¹²⁸ Most of the Dönmes favored the liberal constitution far more than sultanic absolutism. This opposition to Abdülhamit II culminated in the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, marking the beginning of a new era of CUP rule that continued (with several significant interruptions) until the empire’s demise at the end of World War I. Before this period, the Dönmes had been mostly active in Salonica, but the victory of the CUP gave considerable political power to the Dönmes for the first time on an empire-wide scale.

The common goal of the Ottoman opposition was to restore the 1876 Constitution and, with it, the Ottoman Parliament. No one in the movement actually wanted to replace the regime with a nation-state or a secular republic. Outside of this common goal, the oppositional groups and personalities were utterly fragmented in their understanding of modernity, tradition, religion, and science. For example, while most of the Young Turks may have been ideologically materialist, positivist, and anti-religious, the CUP members were

¹²⁴ Zarcone, *Secret et Sociétés Secrètes en Islam*, 81–88.

¹²⁵ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 260.

¹²⁶ Jacob Landau, “Muslim Opposition to Freemasonry,” *Die Welt des Islams* 36: 2 (1996): 186–203.

¹²⁷ Hanioglu, *Young Turks*, 78, 168.

¹²⁸ Hakkı, “Selanik’ten mektup,” *Mesveret*, July 23, 1896, and [Dr.] Nazim, “Vilayetimiz,” *Mesveret*, February 1, 1896. I am thankful to Paul Bessemer for these sources.

more careful in crafting their public discourse, especially with regard to religion. Despite their generally strong negative sentiment toward religion, Young Turks from all factions understood their society well enough to attempt to use religion as a device for modernization.¹²⁹ Likewise, the Dönmes, especially reformists and liberals who participated in the movement, possessed mixed feelings toward religion, tradition, and science. While some of them wanted to reconcile religion and science, others wanted to get rid of religion altogether.

The epicenter of the Ottoman oppositional movement was initially in Paris. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, hundreds of Ottoman students including many Dönmes had gone to European cities for education, but Paris attracted most of them. There the students were exposed to modern ideas of positivism, materialism, atheism, liberalism, nationalism, and constitutionalism, all of which could be considered challenges to the cultural foundations of traditional Ottoman polity and society. By the turn of the century, Ahmet Rıza, Abdullah Cevdet, Ali Suavi, Mizancı Murat, and Dr. Nazım Bey were the most active Young Turks in Paris. When these young men realized that they could not easily transfer “European” ideas to the Ottoman Empire publicly, they developed underground organizations and disseminated their ideas through publications in and outside the empire.

The CUP was initially an umbrella organization containing a number of different underground factions that, taken together, were generally referred to as the Young Turks. It was established in 1889 when six Ottoman Freemasons—Ibrahim Temo, Abdullah Cevdet, Mehmed Reşit, İshak Sukuti, Hüseyinzade Ali, and Şerafettin Mağmumi, all of whom were military students in the faculty of medicine in Istanbul—founded what they intended to be a revolutionary party. Their model was the Italian quasi-masonic revolutionary society, the Carbonari.¹³⁰ This organization would later be transformed into a political party by Bahattin Şakir, who aligned the organization with the Young Turks in 1906. When there was a split between the two leaders of the movement, Ahmet Rıza and Mizancı Murat in Paris in 1897, the latter was convinced to accept the sultan’s pardon and return to Istanbul. Dr. Nazım played a crucial role in convincing Ahmet Rıza to stay on in Paris and continue publishing his magazine *Mesveret*. Another split came at the first congress of the Young Turks, in Paris in 1902, when serious differences appeared between the group around Ahmet Rıza and Dr. Nazım and that of Prince Sabahattin, who was more inclined to solicit foreign powers for help in a possible revolution against the sultan. By 1907 Prince Sabahattin had established a new organization based on his own philosophy, called the Committee for Individual Initiative and De-Centralization (*Teşebbüs-ü Şahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti*), while Dr. Nazım and Bahattin Şakir had established the Ottoman Society for Union and Progress (*Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*).

¹²⁹ Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 305–308.

¹³⁰ Zarcone, *Secret et Sociétés Secrètes en Islam*, 83.

For a variety of reasons, including the sultan's oppressive network of spies, there was little significant CUP activity in Salonica until 1906. That was also the time the modern Salonica under the Dönme mayors was on the rise. A CUP branch was opened in Salonica in 1896, without much success. Another CUP branch was opened later in the same year, and Dönmes are said to have joined in large numbers, but this, too, turned out to be a short-lived endeavor.¹³¹ In 1906, they established their own organization, the Ottoman Freedom Society, with the following members: Major Bursali Mehmet Tahir; Major Naki [Yücekök]; Talat Bey (later pasha); Mustafa Rahmi Bey (from the aristocratic Evranos family); Mithat Şükrü; Captain Edip Servet [Tör]; Hakkı Bahā [Pars]; Captain Kazım Nami [Duru]; Ömer Naci [Duru], who was also a writer for the magazine *Çocuk Bahçesi*; and İsmail Canbulat. All of them except Mehmet Tahir were—or were to become—Freemasons.¹³² They established contact with the Young Turks in Paris in 1907. It was with the Ahmet Rıza-Dr. Nazım faction rather than that of Prince Sabahattin that the link was forged, since they generally found the former's ideas closer to their own. Dr. Nazım, after living abroad for fourteen years, secretly returned to Salonica, met the Salonican group, and recommended that the two groups unite. With this event, opposition to the Ottoman regime began to shift from Paris to Salonica. It would be no exaggeration to say that without Dr. Nazım's ideological role and personal efforts, the fate of the CUP—and with it, Ottoman/Turkish history—would likely have taken a very different turn.¹³³ And Dr. Nazim, to the best of our knowledge, was a Dönme political activist.

In the meantime, Abulhamit II had grown curious about the Dönmes since they were so well represented in the opposition movement. He ordered the deputy chief rabbi of Istanbul, Moshe Levi, to prepare a lengthy report about them. The rabbi requested permission from the sultan to inquire into the details of the affair by consulting the chief rabbi of Salonica, Jacob Hananya Covo. Covo sent a letter in Hebrew to Moshe Levi who had his son, Yeshua Elnecave, translate the letter and submit it to the sultan. The sultan read the report and to the rabbi's surprise, he exclaimed that Sabbatai was a "saint (*veli*)."¹³⁴ We do not know more of Abdülhamid's concerns about the Dönmes, but it seems clear that to him Sabbatai was a "real" Muslim. Once again we see that the actual beliefs of heterodox groups were of little interest to the state, whose chief concerns were the obedience and tranquility of its subjects. The account of the Sabbatean movement by Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha (1833–1933) concurs on this point. Based on his account (which is also the first Ottoman report of the movement since the seventeenth century chroniclers), it is

¹³¹ Hanoğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 88–89.

¹³² Hanoğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 212.

¹³³ For more, see Vahit İpekçi, *Dr. Nazım Bey'in Siyasal Yaşamı* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Üniversitesi, 2006).

¹³⁴ Abraham Galante, "Abdul Hamid II et Sabbetaï Sevi," *Hamenora*, August 1934, 147–149.

possible to think that the official Ottoman perception of the movement and its members had not dramatically changed:

In 1666, Sabbatai Levi [sic] the rabbi claimed to be the Messiah in Izmir and that led to chaos and panic among the Europeans and Jews. . . . That being heard [by the authorities], he was brought from the Grand Vizier's palace (*Sadaret*) to the Sultan's palace (*Dersaadet*) and imprisoned there. Since [Grand Vizier] Köprülü was on the way to the Crete expedition, [Sabbatai] was imprisoned in the castle of Kale-yi Sultani on Dardanelle. Meanwhile another Jew who had the same claim as Sabbatai came to Edirne and reported to the Kaimmakam that Sabbatai had counterfeit claims and causes. Consequently Sabbatai was brought into the presence of the Sultan and questioned there. He confessed that his claims were futile. Afterwards he converted to the true religion. He was appointed as a gardener at the Palace and his family converted to Islam. During ten years many other Jews converted to Islam through his influence.¹³⁵

Kamil Pasha's account, dated 1909, does not appear to be influenced by any trace of current suspicion about the Dönmes or their role in the opposition. Ironically, having served as grand vizier four different terms, it was the CUP that toppled him during the last two, in 1908 and 1913. By the time he was composing this account, the Dönmes were already quite active in the opposition, through their activities in masonic lodges and the CUP. For example, Dr. Nazım was one of the masterminds of the CUP; the Karakaş Mehmet Cavid became active in the CUP while he was serving as a director of the Feyziye School in Salonica, and after 1908 he became the minister of finance in several terms (1909–1913, 1914, and 1917–1918); Mithat Şükrü (1872–1956), an accountant in the department of education served as a secretary of the CUP; the Kapancı Mehmet, founder of the Terakki schools, used his power and wealth to support the CUP; and Yakubi Fazlı Necip and Ahmet Emin, journalists, were in charge of coordinating propaganda activities in Salonica for the Young Turk revolution. By the time of the 1908 Revolution, which limited sultanic power, all the known Dönme publications, such as *Bahçe*, *Tanin*, *Asır*, and *Zaman*, were ardent supporters of the CUP.

Despite the success of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and the CUP's subsequent victory in elections for the restored Parliament, the CUP faced two main centers of opposition. The first one was the Ottoman Liberal Party that was supported by Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha. In order to curb the CUP influence in the Parliament, Kamil Pasha made some changes in the Cabinet in February 1909. But the CUP managed to depose Kamil Pasha and replace him with a sympathizer, Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha. The second center of opposition was found among conservative religious circles that rejected the materialist worldview of the CUP and demanded the restoration of Islamic law. They placed particular blame on the Dönmes, claiming that they were not motivated

¹³⁵ Kamil Pasha, *Tarih-i Siyasi*, II: 104.

by revolutionary ideals but by a secret Masonic-Jewish-Dönme agenda. Dervish Vahdeti became the symbolic name for this opposition. Vahdeti is indeed a puzzling historical character. He came from a very humble background, received a typical Islamic (*madrasa*) education, and was exiled several times even before the Young Turk Revolution because of his anti-sultanic activities. A few months after the revolution, he began to publish a journal, *Volkan*, in which he and other authors vigorously attacked the Dönmes, Jews, Freemasons, and atheists. Vahdeti also argued¹³⁶ that the Germanophile factions within the CUP were coming to dominate the organization. Given the complex political context of the Empire in that point in time, when Germans and Brits were vying for gaining the Ottoman support, Vahdeti might have even been incited—and paid—by England in order to disrepute the CUP. According to *Volkan*'s authors, the CUP elite, that is, Dönmes, Jews, Freemasons, and atheists, were the source of sedition, immorality, and corruption in society. The Dönmes in particular were identified as the real force behind the spread of Freemasonry, immorality, and atheism. Providing examples from the Dönme-run newspapers such as *Zaman* and *Asır*, the authors were trying to show that these people were not true Muslims and therefore could not be sincere or loyal citizens.¹³⁷

To reduce the influence of *Volkan*, the CUP banned it, essentially forbidding its distribution in major cities. However, the real counter-attack was more violent and came in response to an open rebellion that broke out in the capital on April 13, 1909 (traditionally known as March 31 Incident (31 Mart Vakası)). On April 6, 1909, the chief editor of one of the opposition newspapers was murdered, and his funeral turned into a mass protest against the CUP. Their protests continued for the next week, until an armed rebellion broke out on April 13 in Istanbul among the younger officers—essentially the same group responsible for the Young Turk Revolution. It was the soldiers of the First Army positioned at the Taşköprü Barracks who rebelled first; they were soon joined by radical religious students and scholars. The rebels then marched to the Ottoman Parliament, harassing CUP members and supporters that they encountered and even killing some of them, while calling for the “restoration” of Sharia law. For its part, the government blamed *Volkan* for provoking the counter-revolutionary actions and claimed that Dervish Vahdeti was behind the disturbance.

The hastily assembled Action Army (Hareket Ordusu) of Salonica was the CUP's attempt to regroup after being unceremoniously chased out of the imperial capital. It was organized in the CUP's masonic lodge, after which it was dispatched to Istanbul to crush the opposition and restore the CUP to power. The military expedition was launched on April 15, 1909, under the command of Ottoman Third Army Commander Mahmut Şevket Pasha and

¹³⁶ Halide Edip, who witnessed these events, claims that Dervish Vahdeti was suspected of being a paid functionary of the British Embassy's Mr. Fitzmaurice. Halide Edip, *Memoirs of Halide Edip* (New York: Century, 1926), 278–279.

¹³⁷ For an analysis of *Volkan*, see Baer, *The Dönme*, 101–108.

Gendarmerie Commander Galip Pasha, a Dönme and Mason. On the way to Istanbul, a unit of Jewish volunteers also joined the army. Many Salonican Jews served as members of the army and navy, usually as doctors and pharmacists, and they also tended to be fervent supporters of the CUP. The involvement of the Jews and Dönmes in the CUP cause even prompted the British ambassador to Constantinople, Sir Lewis Mallet, to conclude that the Young Turk Revolution was all just a “Jewish conspiracy.”¹³⁸

In Istanbul, the Action Army did not meet much resistance, as the opposition had little in the way of organized military units with which to counter it. As the army was crushing the opposition outside, inside the Ottoman palace a CUP delegation, composed of Emmanuel Carasso (Jewish), Ayan Aram Efendi (Armenian), Ayan Arif Hikmet (Georgian), and Esad Paşa (Albanian) were delivering a message to the sultan that he had been deposed.¹³⁹ Even if his power had been somewhat limited since the 1908 Revolution, Abdülhamit II still enjoyed great support and prestige among the people, so any prosecution or punishment would have been extremely unwise.¹⁴⁰ Instead, he was exiled to Salonica, the CUP’s center of power and therefore the best place to keep him under watch. Vahdeti was caught several months later and hanged after a brief trial on July 19, 1909, along with another 250 “counter-revolutionaries.” The incident showed that the political position of the CUP depended less on its control of the empire’s political apparatus than on its members in the army and its influence within the military in general. By the end of 1909, the CUP had firmly established its authority in the empire, with 360 local headquarters, 850,000 members, a majority in Parliament, and uncontested control of the government.¹⁴¹

Most likely familiar with the accusations about the Dönmes, the CUP activist, Leskovikli Mehmet Rauf, who knew them during his exile in Salonica in 1895–1896, felt impelled to defend them. It was true, he wrote, that the Dönmes did not intermarry, even among their different subsects, but they were loyal, hard-working, freedom-loving “real” Muslims.¹⁴² In the succeeding years, the opposition and even outright hostility to the CUP never fully waned. An English diplomat and longtime resident of Turkey claimed that part of the reason for this hostility was the presence of a large number of intelligent “Israelites” within the CUP:

The element of truth in that portion of the accusation against the Committee relating to Israelites was that in the Committee certain men of exceptional intelligence became from the first specially prominent. One amongst them,

¹³⁸ For the Jewish role in the Revolution, see David Farhi, “Jews of Salonica and Young Turk Revolt,” *Sefunot* 15 (1981): 135–153; Kemal Öke, “The Young Turks, Free Masons, and Jews (1908–1931),” *Studies in Zionism* 7 (1986): 199–218; Robert Olson, “The Young Turks and the Jews,” *Turcica* 18 (1986): 219–235.

¹³⁹ Baer mistakenly assumes that Mehmet Cavid was part of the delegation. Baer, *The Dönme*, 108.

¹⁴⁰ For example, when Nuri Efendi was asked (and then compelled) to issue a fatwa for the deposition of the sultan, he protested and ultimately resigned.

¹⁴¹ Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 288.

¹⁴² Leskovikli Mehmet Rauf, *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, 85–88.

Jevad Bey [sic], shortly afterwards appointed Minister of Finance, was a man of financial ability and possessed of a great faculty for explaining what he meant. A native of Salonica, he is reputed to belong to a Crypto-Jewish sect largely represented in that city, and known as *Dunmays*, which professes Moslemism, but in secret practices the rites of the Jewish faith. But while everybody recognized the ability of Jevad [sic], he was probably the most unpopular man in the Committee.¹⁴³

Another private and confidential English report from 1910 claims that Freemasons and the CUP were intimately connected:

New Freemasonry in Turkey, unlike that of England and America, is in great part secret and political, and information on the subject is only obtainable in strict confidence, while those who betray its political secrets seem to stand in fear of the hand of the Mafia. . . . [Salonica] has a population of about 140,000, of whom 80,000 are Spanish Jews and 20,[000] of the sect of Sabetai Levi or Crypto-Jew, who externally profess Islamism.¹⁴⁴

According to the same report, it was Dr. Nazım's ambition to create an autonomous Jewish state in Mesopotamia. "Dr. Nazım, one of the most influential members of the Salonica Committee and *said to be of Jewish extraction*, has, in company, with his *fidus Achates*, a certain Faik Bey Toledo, a Crypto-Jew of Salonica, visited the Paris branch of the I.C.A. (Judeo-Colonisation Association) and has since openly advocated importing 200,000 Roumanian Jews into Macedonia and some millions of Russian Jews into Mesopotamia."¹⁴⁵ The *Journal de Salonique* also refers to the same event, writing that Dr. Nazım welcomed the influx of some two million Muslims and an additional 200,000 Jews. "Upon this Judeo-Muslim project," stated Sam Levy, the editor of the journal, "rested the life or death of European Turkey."¹⁴⁶

Between 1910 and 1916, Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theories regarding the CUP were fueled both by and within the British government through diplomatic correspondence. As seen in English secret service reports by 1917, England was closely monitoring the activities of the prominent Ottoman figures, including the Dönmes. Some of the Dönmes whose names and identities were discussed in these reports were Balçılı Ibrahim Bey, Cavid Bey, Hasan Tahsin Bey, Karakaş Efendi, Sarım Kibar, Necip Fazlı Bey, and Remzi Bey.¹⁴⁷ To Hanioğlu, allied propaganda during World War I exploited these conspiracies

¹⁴³ Edwin Pears, *Forty Years in Constantinople* (London: Perkins, 1916), 116.

¹⁴⁴ Kedourie, "Young Turks," 95.

¹⁴⁵ Kedourie, "Young Turks," 99.

¹⁴⁶ Cooperman, *Turco-Jewish Relations*, 156.

¹⁴⁷ Bülent Özdemir, *İngiliz İstihbarat Raporlarında Fişlenen Türkiye* (Istanbul: Yeditepe, 2008), 30, 33, 40, 53, 62, 72, 77.

in order to discredit the CUP and to incite the Arabs to revolt against the CUP government.¹⁴⁸ Ironically the same England was trying to strike a deal with France and Russia through the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the British Jews through the Balfour declaration (1917). Lewis also blames England for disseminating conspiracy theories which were claiming that the CUP was simply a cabal of Jews and Freemasons. Baer criticizes Lewis's approach, and claim that his aim was to deflect charges against Turkish anti-Semitism.¹⁴⁹ While there is undeniably a clear streak of anti-Jewish hostility in much of the anti-CUP opposition, it would be wrong to reduce the entire opposition to the *Volkān*'s "anti-Semitism." March 31 incident was a culmination of the frustration of several anti-CUP groups, including Islamists, and the circles around the *Volkān*, *Serbesti*, and *Mizan* newspapers.

One of the interesting results of the Young Turk Revolution was that both the former crypto-Christian Istavri and the Kromlides were officially recognized as Christians in 1910 (see Chapter 5). But as Deringil notes, the new regime enforced military service obligations for Muslims and non-Muslims alike; therefore, there was no longer any advantage in claiming Muslim or non-Muslim status.¹⁵⁰

In November 1911, all political parties and groups opposing the CUP united under the umbrella of a newly established Party of Freedom and Accord (Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası) that was composed of a group of conservatives and liberals such as Damat Ferit Pasha, Rıza Tevfik, Refik Halit (Karay), and Rıza Nur. These men had little in common apart from their hatred of the CUP. Only three weeks after its establishment, the party managed to win the election in Istanbul. This success led to a period of further political turmoil in an already chaotic empire, and eventually led, amid the despair and confusion of the Balkan Wars, to the Raid on the Port (Babiali Baskını) in 1913 when the CUP reclaimed the government through military intervention and established an authority that would remain largely unchallenged until the end of World War I. The masterminds behind the raid were, among others, Enver Bey (later pasha), Talat Bey, Filibeli Hilmi, Mithat Şükrü, Yakup Cemil, and Dr. Nazım. Elections for the Parliament were held in the winter of 1913–1914, and although the opposition was not formally banned, it did not take part. Meanwhile, the empire had undergone the disastrous Balkan Wars (1912–1913); lost nearly all of its remaining European possessions, including Salonica; and had continued to debate whether to support England or Germany in a possible future world war. While liberal economist Cavid Bey was calling for an alliance with England, Dr. Nazim was exhorting his colleagues on the CUP's Central Committee not to hurry into the war.

¹⁴⁸ Hanoğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 260.

¹⁴⁹ Baer, *The Dönme*, 102.

¹⁵⁰ Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 138.

Between Tradition and Modernity

The Dönmes' first Salonica-wide and, subsequently, empire-wide economic and political power made their relationship with their own tradition ever more complex. Ms. Rafiza Hasna published a poem in the women's weekly, *Kadın*, shortly before the March 31 Incident:

This ceiling is low, deterring us from standing up . . .
Always under heavy curtains, obstructing . . .
What should we do? Tell me, o Grand Fortune . . .
This ceiling is low, the house is old and the face is sickly . . .
Brothers, always with epilepsy and leprosy . . .
Searched for unity and solidarity, alas, it did not work . . .
Find a way, give us a hand, O, Age of Progress! . . .
This tribe is no longer alive, it is perished . . .

What kind of house is this, with a low ceiling, heavy curtains, and sick inhabitants? Surprisingly, the poet is not a woman but a man, Kapancı Rasim Haşmet (who was a graduate of the Terakki School and also one of the early Turkish socialists), and the house was the centuries-old Dönme tradition. The journal itself is an interesting joint venture of members of both the Kapancı and Karakaş communities. Authors' fear of using their own names and their employment of female noms de plume reflect the uncertainty of these passionate young poets about expressing critical opinions on the Dönme tradition. *Kadın*'s owner was Mustafa Ibrahim, and its editor was Aka Gündüz, who at different times used Enis Avni and Seniha Hikmet as his pen names. Some of the other contributors were Ali Canip, Tahsin Nahid, Mustafa Nermi, and Karakaş Akil Fevzi. In the next issue of the journal, Uzma İradet (Akil Fevzi Koyuncu) published another poem, entitled, "Of Our Secret Illnesses," explicating further the sentiments of Rafiza Hesna.

This ceiling is low, this house is old,
and we are sick and weak . . .
for three hundred years,
we have been suffering, sad and crying . . .
if we do not want to be fallen, rotten and dead
let's demolish it with one kick . . .
let's rip apart the black curtain, and take a breath!

Every word in the poem was a strong expression of the *burden of silence* that had been in effect for 300 years. These feelings were, however, not shared by everyone in the community. Upset with their anti-traditional and revolutionary rhetoric, other fictional orthodox female characters, Zekiyehanım and Makbulé Sureyya, responded vigorously in the journal's next issue:

[you say] "This ceiling is low, the house is old and the face is sickly"
We are the ones who lift up the ceiling . . .

We are the ones who are to strive, not to cry
“This tribe is no longer alive, it is perished”
No, this tribe will never perish, never!
It will be there forever, with our determination

The defenders show themselves in favor of mending the “house” through the spirit of collaboration rather than demolishing it entirely. Replying to this plea, Uzma İradet wrote a longer poem, more confrontational, entitled “Of Our Secret Illnesses, Part II” that was scheduled to be published in the May 17, 1909, issue, but it was censored by the editorial board—possibly expressing greater sensitivity to political issues that followed the March 31 incident and its suppression. In the poem, the author uses metaphors such as “ten thousand weak souls,” “a handful of poor people who lived in complete secrecy and misery for three hundred years,” “dark curtain,” “sick faces,” “rotten souls,” and “dying tribe.” As claimed by Odabaşı, the implied critical content of the poem was likely the main reason it was pulled from the magazine.¹⁵¹ Nüzhet Haşim testifies that these poems that repeatedly allude to a “deep social illness” created a stir among the Salonicans.¹⁵² It is clear that the Karakaş Koyuncu and the Kapancı Haşmet were of the opinion that the Dönme “caste” should be assimilated into Turkish society. When they crossed the line, the CUP elders told these “young men” that it was still too early to discuss the issue publicly. As a result, the editorial board decided to remove the poem from the journal and republished the issue without it. A full public discussion about the Dönme tradition had to wait until early Republican times.

From a letter written by a Salonian immigrant in 1925, we learn an extremely interesting detail about the existence of a revolutionary Dönme cell in Salonica in the 1910s.¹⁵³ Apparently, Rasim Haşmet and Akil Koyuncu were not alone. According to this account, a series of developments led to the emergence of a secret organization that aimed to protect those who wished to leave the community. In addition to the young Haşmet and Koyuncu, the author mentions several other names, such as Ibrahim Efendi, who openly left the community as a result of a disagreement; Dr. Saadettin Vedat and Major Abdurrahman, both of whom attacked the tradition; the military doctor, Tevfik Efendi, who believed in destroying the tradition outright; another military doctor, Mazlum Efendi, who married a Turk and married his daughter to a Turk; and the pharmacist Ziya from the Topçu family, who married a Turkish girl in Egypt. The communal elders threatened them, saying that had they left, they could never survive on their own, but having left, would not be

¹⁵¹ Arda Odabaşı, “Kadın Dergisi Üzerine Bazı Notlar ve Basına Yansıyan ilk Sabatayism Tartışması,” *Muteffrika* 37 (2010): 83–112.

¹⁵² Cited in Odabaşı, “Kadın Dergisi Üzerine.”

¹⁵³ “Dönmelerin hayatını pek yakından tedkik eden bir karimizin mektubu ve bir teklifi,” *Son Saat*, December 14, 1925.

readmitted to the community fold. After the Young Turk Revolution, a secret committee was established to protect those who wanted to leave the community. The committee consisted of Lule (?) Şeyhi Ömer, army officer Nuri, naval officer Ziya, gendarmerie officer Hilmi, pharmacist Şevket, chemist Hakkı, customs officer Hüseyin Efendi, the aforementioned İbrahim Efendi (who had left the Dönmes), and several other enlightened men. Later, several more young men joined the committee and swore that they had left the Dönme community. Şeyhi Ömer was expelled from the committee, charged with corruption and abusing his power over the young men. However, it is the letter writer's conviction that it was this group's activities that had caused the greatest damage to the Dönme community since the Balkan Wars. Unfortunately, we do not have a corroborating source regarding the size, impact, or even the existence of such an organization. But given the inner tension of the Dönme communities, such a development is completely reasonable.

Tension between the orthodox and assimilationist factions had indeed been growing since the second half of the nineteenth century, due to modernization and the increasingly cosmopolitan character of the society at large. In 1881, for example, Fazlı Necib was dividing the tradition into two: unfavorable and favorable (*adet-i mezmume ve makbule*).¹⁵⁴ Or as quoted by Sabiha Sertel, Dr. Nazım was trying to smash the tradition and create a new culture.¹⁵⁵ The following excerpt from Lucy Garnett illustrates the still-incomplete transformation:

Either from the fact of Sabbathai's having disappeared from the world at Belgrade, or from his having left Salonica by the Vardar gate, he is expected to arrive from that direction, and every day, for the last two centuries, a Dunmeh has gone out on this road at sunrise in order to meet and welcome him. Since the opening of the railway between Belgrade and Salonica, a question has arisen as to the possibility of the Messiah's arrival in the latter city by train. And consequently, report says, a Dunmeh is always to be seen at the terminus when the northern mail is due, watching eagerly for the passenger who has tarried so long, and at whose coming the Faithful will be rewarded for their long watching and service by being appointed lords of the earth.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Fazlı Necip, "Adet Hakkında Bir İki Söz," transliterated by Cengiz Sisman, *Tarih ve Toplum* (Temmuz 2002), 10.

¹⁵⁵ Sabiha Sertel, *Roman Gibi: Anilar* (İstanbul: Cem, 1978), 76.

¹⁵⁶ Garnett, *Women of Turkey*, 101. About this practice, Leon Sciaky tells that to the very end of Ottoman rule in Salonica, "a delegation of seven was wont to go to the gate of the city every morning to scan the roads and to see whether Sabbathai Cevi was coming back that day." Sciaky, *Farewell to Salonica* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2003), 147. Kaufmann Kohler relates that "every Saturday the Yakubis send a woman and her children to the seashore to inquire whether the ship which is to bring Jacob is sighted; and every morning the elders scrutinize the horizon for a similar purpose." Kohler, "Dönmeh" *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1905), 639. Safi too believes that Dönmes have been waiting for the second coming of the messiah at the city gates. *Dönmeler Adedi*, 27. Yet another source states that "they believe that one day the patriarch Jacob will appear and on Saturday they send a woman and her children to the sea-shore to inquire whether the ship has been sighted. Every morning the elders scrutinize the horizon for the same purpose." *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, December 2, 1932, 3.

The tension between the old and new can be clearly seen in Yalman's memoirs, where he compares his "modern" father, Osman Tevfik, and "traditionalist" uncle, Abdurrahman Nafiz (the father-in-law of Fazli Necip).¹⁵⁷ One could see the tension even in the same person. In those days, there were many believers in all three of the major monotheistic faiths who tried to reconcile their faith with the experience of modernization. In the Ottoman case, science, for some, superseded religion and faith, but for others, it was possible to inject Western scientific mindset, stripped of its moral/religious values, into a Muslim society. Namık Kemal, Elmalili Hamdi Yazır, Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, and Said Nursi are just a few of the Ottoman intellectuals to adopt such a strategy. The emergence and rise of this popular scientific ideology, as argued by Hanoğlu, drove Ottoman intellectuals to align themselves into three camps. The first advocated or wholeheartedly adopted modern Western ideologies; the second, a reactionary group, accused the modernist group of alienating itself from its own culture; and a third group whose ideas—perhaps less dogmatic than those of the others—lay somewhere between those of the "super-Westernized" elite and the "reactionaries."¹⁵⁸ Dönme intellectuals followed these same basic patterns.

In his discussion of "religious actors and societal transformation," Baer claims that the Dönmes were *not* secularist before 1923 and that their activities cannot be said to have anticipated secular nationalism.¹⁵⁹ As discussed earlier, although this statement is true for the orthodox Dönmes, it is not necessarily accurate for the reformists and assimilationists who, similar to some of the positivist Young Turks and Freemasons, aimed to "secularize" society at the expense of religion. Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, it is important to understand that Dönmes were not only divided along the lines of their subsect identities but also according to their ideological stance toward modernity, enlightenment, and Westernization. By the turn of the twentieth century there were traditionalist/orthodox, reformists, and liberal/assimilationist individuals in each of the subsects. It seems reasonable to assume that at first, the majority of them were reformist, persons who were in some ways both religious and progressive. It is only later, in the coming decades of revolution, war, and reconfigured national identity, that the pendulum swung irrevocably toward the assimilationists, at the expense of the orthodox.

Farewell to the Salonican "Golden Age"

Although there were Dönmes lived in other Ottoman cities in small numbers, Salonica was the heartland of their existence. The Ottomans surrendered Salonica to the Greek Army without much resistance during the Balkan Wars on

¹⁵⁷ Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim* (İstanbul: Yenilik, 1970)

¹⁵⁸ Hanoğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 13–14.

¹⁵⁹ Baer, *The Dönme*, 60–64, and 79.

November 9, 1912. It was a traumatic experience for the Muslims and Dönmes who had to relinquish their beloved city where they had lived for centuries. Rapid Hellenization, World War I, the Great Fire in 1917, and last, a forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1924 sealed the fate of fin-de-siècle Ottoman Salonica, relegating it to the memories of former inhabitants of the city. For the Jews, as Leon Sciaky states, adapting to the new regime was not that difficult.¹⁶⁰ But that was not the case for the Muslims and Dönmes.

After 1912, Muslims and Dönmes gradually left town for other cities in the empire, Europe, and America. Osman Sait, the last Ottoman mayor, retained his post until 1916, but most of the other municipal and governmental positions were transferred to the Greek nationalist elite. The Turks had totally disappeared by 1913, and only a few Kapancı Dönmes remained among the city's governing elite: Mehmet Kapancı, a banker; his son Namık Kapancı, a banker; Firuz Kapancı, a secretary and son of Ahmet Kapancı; and Mehmet, a textile merchant.¹⁶¹

The Dönmes made several attempts to remain in the city, including negotiating with the Greek authorities and attempting to return to Judaism. It is not clear from the existing evidence whether these attempts were made on a communal basis or limited to a few individuals. Several wrote to Prime Minister Venizelos, suggesting to him that Salonica remain an international city rather than becoming a Greek province so that it would continue to prosper. In such a scenario, the city would become an independent city-state under the mandate of the Habsburg Empire, whose passport many Dönmes already carried.¹⁶² This suggestion was rejected by the Greek nation-state.

In another instance, some members of the community approached the Jewish religious authorities requesting to return to Judaism so they could stay in the city without losing their belongings. But the Jewish authorities rejected this request. According to a 1914 circular, the chief rabbi of Istanbul still held the traditional Jewish attitude toward the Dönmes, accusing them of "immorality, sexual perversity, infidelity, lack of honor, dishonesty, blasphemy, trickery, charlatanism, financial impropriety, and lack of ethics."¹⁶³ Theodore Bent reports a similar Jewish attitude prevailing at least as far back as the 1880s. One of his informants, Rabbi Nehemiah, was shocked when Bent asked him for information concerning the Dönmes, calling them "a loathsome people, a people who deserve to be forgotten and blotted out of mind."¹⁶⁴ Echoing this rabbinical anathema, historian Nehama (1880–1971) repeats that the Dönmes lived in sexual anarchy, swapped wives, and had relations with

¹⁶⁰ Leon Sciaky, *Farewell to Salonica*, Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2003), 255.

¹⁶¹ Baer, *The Dönme*, 113.

¹⁶² Baer, *The Dönme*, 112.

¹⁶³ Cited in Joseph Nehema, *Histoire des Israelites de Salonique* (Thessaloniki: Communauté Israélite de Thessalonique, 1935–1978), V: 73.

¹⁶⁴ Bent, "Peculiar People," 24–36.

married women. But at the same time he also acknowledges that the Bible, the Talmud, the commentaries of Rashi, the *Shulchan Arukh*, were present in the libraries of their educated members. The Zohar remained a major reference for them, and certain members of their sects were known to memorize it, either in whole or in part.¹⁶⁵ This sour relationship with the Jews could still be seen in the memoirs of the Dönmes several years afterward. Eli Shaul of Izmir relates the stories of his friends among the “former Jews” (*eski çifit*), that is, Dönmes, describing them as an interesting people, who celebrated Jewish holidays, fasted on Yom Kippur, ate unleavened bread during Passover, and married among their own kind. Once, he asked one of his friends, İsmail the Goldsmith, why they did not just declare themselves Jews and get rid of this burden; İsmail replied: “We wanted to return to Judaism in Salonica, but the rabbis did not accept us. They asked us to do *tevila* (ritual immersion) and *giyur* (full conversion). Why was it necessary to do all that? Everyone calls us Dönme. Had we converted to Judaism again, what would they have called us? Double Dönme!”¹⁶⁶ The only known successful attempt to return to Judaism from the period is the case of a young Dönme, called Enver, who befriended Zionist Jewish students in Istanbul University and immigrated to Israel in 1914. Once Cemal Pasha found out about Enver, however, he was deported from the city.¹⁶⁷ Ironically, according to a Jewish account, the military commander of Jerusalem in 1914 was Zeki Bey and he was a Dönme.¹⁶⁸ Cemal Pasha removed him and replaced him with Midhat Bey in 1915.

World War I and the Great Fire of Salonica in 1917 brought more hardship to the Dönme in the city (as well as to its other inhabitants). Razing the entire heartland of the old city, the fire destroyed almost all of the former Karakaş and Kapancı neighborhoods, including the house of Osman Baba and the Kadi Abdullah Mosque. While the reasons for the fire remain shrouded in mystery, it gave the Greeks an unexpected opportunity to Hellenize the city further. They were more easily able to eradicate much of the city’s Ottoman past—now in ruins, including the Dönme and Jewish aspects. Remaining buildings in other parts of the city were either confiscated or bought by the government. For example, Mehmet Kapancı’s famous villa (built in 1893 by architect Pierro Arrigoni and today located at 108 Vasilissis Street) served as the home of the

¹⁶⁵ Nehama, *Histoire des Israélites de Salonique*, VI: 49, 60, 73.

¹⁶⁶ Cited in Bali, *Scapegoat*, 185–186. About his other Dönme friend, Shaul recounts that “Hakki Efendi would go to the mosque, but his house was full of books about Judaism. His most sincere form of vow was ‘Por el Şabat bendijo tenemos’ (for the holy Shabbat that we possess). Jewish holidays were his holidays. He would fast on Yom Kippur, and eat unleavened bread. . . . One day he told me: ‘We are Jews in our hearts and minds.’ All of the Dönmes also had a second Jewish name.”

¹⁶⁷ Ben Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 127–128.

¹⁶⁸ Hemda Ben Yehudah, *Jerusalem; Its Redemption and Future* (New York: Christian Herald, 1918), 18–19. According to this account, the Germans in the city criticized his manners, saying “that he wasted his time in amusements during these days of grave anxiety. They nicknamed him ‘Der Tanz Pasha’ (The Dance Pasha). He spoke admirably both French and English, having lived in Europe and America. It was said that he was of Jewish ancestry, and belonged to the Donne sect.”

first Greek military governor of Salonica, Prince Nikolaos and his wife, subsequently becoming the home of Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, and ultimately acquired by the National Bank of Greece. Likewise, the Ahmed and Yusuf Kapancı villa (built in 1905, also by architect Pierro Arrigoni and today located at 105 Vasilissis Street) was divided into three parts; the ground floor was occupied by Ahmed's son Mehmed, who had Serbian citizenship; the first floor was inhabited by the Spanish consul; and the second floor was used to house Greek refugees from Anatolia. When Mehmet died, his share was expropriated by the Greek state. Both villas survive today (Figure 7.5). Currently, Mehmet Kapancı's villa is used as a cultural center by the National Bank of Greece, and the Ahmed and Yusuf Kapancı villa has been sold to businessman and philanthropist Iannis Avdis. As Molho and Hastaoglu state, these houses are good examples of Dönme taste for a bold architectural synthesis of Western European and Ottoman forms.¹⁶⁹

The fire did not spare the Dönme schools, either. The Feyziye continued to provide education in a different building until 1923, with the support of the Mısırlı and Kibar families. The Terakki schools had already been occupied by the Allies during World War I. In 1919, the government confiscated the main building and turned it into a hospital. In his memoirs, Karakaş Reşat Tesal, son of the Greek parliamentarian for the city between 1913 and 1924, Ömer Dürrü Tesal, vividly portrays how hard it was to be a Dönme and a Turkish student in Greek schools after the fire.¹⁷⁰

While the Dönmes were struggling hard to keep their positions and properties in Salonica, many of their brethren had already begun a new life in other Ottoman cities, principally in Istanbul, where they were in the process of creating new Dönme spaces, including businesses, institutions, schools, hospitals, temples, and the like. Several of them were already active in politics, particularly in the CUP government as ministers and parliamentarians. For example, Mehmet Cavid and Faik Nüzhet [Terem] both served as Ottoman ministers of finance in the empire's last decade. In addition to his informal role as special emissary and his leading role on the CUP's Central Committee, Dr. Nazım was also one of the founding members of the Ottoman Secret Service, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, in 1913, and served as minister of education in 1918. Mustafa Arif [Deymer] (1874–1954) served as Ottoman interior minister in 1918–1919 and minister of education in 1921. Midhat Şükrü continued for years to serve as the secretary of CUP. Dr. Tevfik Rüştü [Aras] became a member of the Renewal (Teceddüt) Party (1918) and of the Turkish Communist Society (1920), while Ahmed Emin [Yalman] became a founding member of the Society for Wilsonian Principles in 1919. The Dönmes' involvement,

¹⁶⁹ Rena Molho and Vilma Hastaoglu, *Jewish Sites in Thessaloniki* (Athens: Lycabettus, 2009), 43–45. These two villas are often mistakenly ascribed to Mehmet Kapancı. Ahmed Kapancı's son, Mehmed, lived in his family house until 1939, and that's why the second house came to be known as Mehmet Kapancı villa.

¹⁷⁰ Tesal, *Selanik'ten İstanbul'a*, 40–44.

particularly that of Mustafa Arif, Dr. Nazim, and his brother-in-law Tevfik Rüştü, in the CUP decision-making mechanism was so decisive that some people ascribed to them key roles in governmental decisions about the Armenian deportation and subsequent massacres in 1915.¹⁷¹ As discussed later, this growing visibility in the political arena attracted considerable critical attention to the Dönmes both in Turkey and abroad.

World War I sealed the fate of the tottering Ottoman Empire, as well as giving birth to several independent and semi-independent nation-states in the Middle East and the Balkans. Consecutive wars in the first quarter of the twentieth century were major calamities for Muslims, Christians, and Jews who had been living in various parts of the empire for ages. Migrations, famine, epidemics, deportations, and massacres became part of everyday life. Muslims and Jews fled or were deported from the Balkan countries while Armenians were deported wholesale from Anatolia. Additional wars in the Arab lands between 1911 and 1916, and the Turkish War of Independence left millions dead and even more displaced. It is estimated that nearly two million Muslims, more than one million Armenians, half a million Greeks, and thousands of Jews were killed between 1915 and 1922. These were extraordinary times for all who were involved.

When the war came to an end in 1918 and the top CUP rulers (including Dr. Nazim) escaped to Europe aboard a German submarine, the future prospects of Salonica's Dönme population grew darker. The victorious Entente Powers (England and France) took control of key parts of the empire's remaining domains, including the capital, and allowed its minor allies (Italy and Greece) to aggressively occupy other parts, eventually triggering Turkish Muslim resistance that resulted in the hard-fought Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922). These developments worsened the status of the Muslims and Dönmes in Greece and Orthodox Greeks in Turkey. Some Dönmes also took part in the Turkish/Muslim struggle against the occupiers.¹⁷² The War of Independence ended with a Turkish victory, acknowledged by the Lausanne Treaty of July 24, 1923, and marked the official birth of the nation-state of Turkey. During the long treaty negotiations, Greece was represented by Venizelos and Caclamanos, and Turkey was represented by İsmet İnönü, Hasan Saka, and Dr. Rıza Nur. Several advisors, such as former Chief Rabbi Haim Nahum, Munir Ertegun, Celal Bayar, and Cavid Bey were there during the negotiations. Mehmed Cavid, however, appears to have fallen out with other members of the delegation—İsmet İnönü, in particular—and returned to Istanbul. There he seems to have been peripherally involved in political

¹⁷¹ Bali, *Scapegoat*, 277–317. According to the War Crimes Commission, which was formed on the initiative of Mustafa Arif [Deymer], the number of Armenian victims of the Ottoman Deportation Order of 1915 was 800,000. *Vakit*, March 15, 1919.

¹⁷² For example, the founders of the resistance organization in Kuzguncuk were Captain Memduh Bey, Karakaş Hasan Pasha's two merchant sons, Ibrahim and Refik Bey, and Bektashi Ali Nutku Baba. Hüsamettin Öztürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası* (Istanbul: Hilmi Kitabevi, 1996), 222.

discussions about organizing opposition to İnönü and Ataturk.¹⁷³ The treaty also included a convention, signed on January 30, 1923, which called for a population exchange between the Muslims in Greece and Orthodox Christians in Turkey. In fact, by 1914, the Ottomans had already proposed a large-scale peacetime population exchange, but the idea had not materialized by the time World War I began.¹⁷⁴ According to the treaty, the Greeks in Istanbul and Turks in Western Thrace were to be excluded from the exchange. The irony here is that the secular nation-state, although purporting to drop religious conditions for full “citizenship,” did not do so but instead continued to maintain an unofficial ranking of persons and communities according to religious affiliation, similar to the Ottoman Empire’s “millet-system.”¹⁷⁵ In the end, the remaining non-Muslims who stayed in Turkey were asked to abandon the communal rights preserved by the Lausanne Treaty in exchange for acceptance as full Turkish citizens with equal rights and responsibilities before the law. Of course, this was a very frustrating development for the more religious members of the Christian and Jewish communities who wished to retain their communal and religious autonomies.

Since the Dönmes were considered by both sides to be Muslim, they, too, were subject to the population exchange. The Dönme existence and migration to different cities in Turkey, the Balkans, and Europe for business and education purposes had already begun in the nineteenth century. For example, as early as 1830s, an English traveler had identified “Hasan Adjik, one of the ministry at Constantinople, and his brother, who is Gumrukji, or collector of the customs at Saloniki.”¹⁷⁶ Ottoman documents indicated that the several Avdetis were stocking merchants in Istanbul in the 1834.¹⁷⁷ They established themselves in this business so thoroughly that one of them (Selanikli Motoş Efendizade) Ali Ağa (d.1877), served as the *kethüda* (chamberlain) of the Stocking Merchants (Figure 7.6).¹⁷⁸ Dr. Nazim and several other Dönmes went to school in Istanbul in the 1890s. Ahmet Emin [Yalman]’s family moved to Istanbul at the turn of the century. Several Dönmes were known to be living in Edirne in the early 1900s.¹⁷⁹ In fact, some of them were descendants of those who had never left Izmir, Istanbul, or Edirne for Salonica. Nevertheless, 1912 was a turning point for the mass migration of Dönmes to major cities in Turkey. For example, Şemsi Efendi and his family; Kapancı Tevfik Ehat and his family; and Sabiha Sertel’s father, Nazmi Bey, and the brothers Celal and Mecdi Dervish all left the city in 1912. As Sertel relates, her family found good

¹⁷³ Baer, *The Dönme*, 171.

¹⁷⁴ Fuat Dundar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskan Politikası* (İstanbul: İletişim 2001), 63–64.

¹⁷⁵ For more, see Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁷⁶ Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece*, III: 250.

¹⁷⁷ BOA, HAT 18700/A Dosya # 318.

¹⁷⁸ I am thankful to Sinan Çuluk who shared with me this image and the previous document.

¹⁷⁹ Hartmann, *Der Islamische Orient*, 185.



FIGURE 7.6 Tombstone: Kethüda Motoş Efendizade, Bülbülderesi Cemetery, Istanbul. Courtesy of Sinan Çuluk.

jobs and settled in nice houses in Istanbul.¹⁸⁰ The families of Mustafa Kemal and Ahmet Emin [Yalman] followed them. Faik Nüzhet [Terem] left the city after World War I.

Shortly before the population exchange, the Dönme Mustafa Arif [Kenber] (d. 1941), who was a parliamentarian himself and the father-in-law of Faik Nüzhet, handed a petition to his Greek parliamentarian friend, Gonatas, and asked him to consider the Dönmes as Jews at heart and by conviction, and to exempt them from the exchange.¹⁸¹ The Greek parliamentarians debated the issue but decided that these people were “more dangerous than the Turks” and therefore had to be subjected to the exchange. A similar petition was given to the Turkish delegate during the Lausanne Treaty negotiations. As related by Rıza Nur, who was in charge of “non-Muslim” affairs in Turkey, the Karakaş Müslihiddin Adil [Taylan] (1881–1944, who would later serve as Turkish Minister of Education), approached him and requested that the “Dönmes” be exempted from the exchange. After discussing this offer with other people, Rıza Nur found it unacceptable, and also wrong, even for the Dönmes’ own interest. He said, “had they stayed in Salonica, the Greeks

¹⁸⁰ Sertel, *Annem*, 71.

¹⁸¹ *Vakit*, January 4, 1924, and *İleri*, January 6, 1924.

would have destroyed them first economically, and then demographically.”¹⁸² Interestingly, his prophecy came true for a different reason. During World War II, the Nazis deported nearly all the Jews in Salonica, or about 42,000 souls altogether, to concentration camps, and only 3,000 of them survived. To this day, many Dönmes consider this “miracle” the “messianic redemption,” promised by Sabbatai centuries earlier. Had they been considered Jews and stayed in Salonica rather than coming to Turkey, they could have been sent to the concentration camps, and be perished.

Both attempts to remain in Salonica were made by the Karakas Dönmes, which makes one wonder what—if any—role the Yakubis and Kapancıs played in these efforts. If we think of the strong assimilationist tendencies among the other groups, it would not be surprising to see them acquiescing to the population exchange.

Some individual Dönmes made similar claims as Jews in other parts of the empire. Ben Zwi relates that during the occupation of Istanbul (1918–1923), when the Allies appointed members of minorities to certain positions in their headquarters, several of the Dönmes applied for employment, basing their application on the claim that they were Jews. According to the *Jewish Bulletin*, the allied authorities “admitted they were of pure Jewish origin, never having intermarried and remaining a pure Jewish race.” Their applications, however, were rejected. Ironically, just before they were deported from Turkey, the crypto-Christian Kromlides, who reconverted to Christianity a while ago, pleaded with the Ottoman officials that they were Muslims, but this was ignored as well.¹⁸³

Against all odds, the Dönmes had remained active in Salonica’s economy until the end of the population exchange of 1924. However, the Lausanne Treaty gave them no choice but to leave everything. It was time to move to Turkey once and for all. Only a small number of Dönmes who had been able to acquire different citizenships, such as Albanian, Greek, Serbian, and Austrian, were able to stay in Salonica. For the rest, the mass exodus, reminiscent of the Spanish Expulsion of their forefathers in 1492, commenced in 1924.

¹⁸² Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıralarım*, xx.

¹⁸³ Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 138.

From Empire to Nation-State

Resettlement in Modern Turkey

SHORTLY BEFORE THE ARRIVAL of the Dönmes in Turkey, the young country, the Turkish elite, similar to other nationalists of the time, envisioned having a “new country,” a “new citizen,” a “new Turk,” and a “new subjectivity.” New citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, were expected to cut their ties with the past and to acquire a strong nationalist and secular worldview. As reflected in the title of a book by an assimilationist Turkish Jew, Abraham Galante, *Citizen, Speak Turkish!*, Turkification became the mantra of the new Republic.¹

The physical relocation may have been a traumatic experience for the Dönme, but it was one that could be overcome. Istanbul and Izmir were not entirely foreign lands, since many of the relocating individuals already had businesses and family connections there. From a theological point of view, the new home could be simply considered a new Holy Land, as the believers were of the opinion that until the messiah comes, “wherever a *maamin* steps becomes Israel.”

The exclusivist nature of the new national identity, however, created a “violent” relationship between the state and the individuals on both a physical and psychic level. Neyzi rightly points out that the history of Republican identity politics is also the history of “silencing, hiding, dissimulation and assimilation.”² This violence forced people to hide their individual identities and to suppress their past. As Yurdaş claims, the Dönmes had long kept their identity private and it was relatively easy for them to adapt to the new Turkish identity.³ Dönmes identified themselves with Kemalism for historic reasons and because secularism promised a national identity that would transcend tradition. However, the continued identification of Turkishness with Muslim

¹ For the “Turkification” policies, see Rifat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1999).

² Leyla Neyzi, *Ben Kimim* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), 9.

³ Aslı Yurdaş, “Meşru Vatandaşlık, Gayri Meşru Kimlik? Türkiye'de Sabetaycılık,” unpublished MA thesis (Bogaziçi University, 1991). I am grateful to Aslı who shared her manuscript and extra interview notes with me.

heritage/Turkish ethnicity caused individuals with different personal histories to hide their origins.⁴ In the long run, repressing the past would create an anxiety of remembrance, with accompanying fear and stress.

According to the Lausanne Treaty, Turkey was to permit the members of any religion to practice their religious obligations as long as they did not conflict with the “public order or moral standards.” In theory, this meant that practicing crypto-religions in private was acceptable. After the Reform Edict in 1856, this could have been a new opportunity for the crypto-communities to relinquish or revert to their original faith. In practice, however, modern Turkish ideology continually searched for ways to transform even the private spheres of personal belief to its secular and nationalist agenda. In this new repressive environment, the *burden of silence* was perpetuated for different reasons for the orthodox, reformist, and liberal Dönmes.

As the Dönme elite easily slipped into many of the leading roles in the process of establishing the modern Turkey, the Dönme identity, for the first time in centuries, began to be publicly questioned by insiders and outsiders. As a result of heated debates in the media, all Dönmes publicly adopted the new national and secular Turkish identity. But internally, the intense strife between the orthodox, reformist, and assimilationist strains led the members of the subgroups to keep either their “ethnically and religiously Jewish” identity, or just “ethnically Jewish” identity. From this moment on, the dividing line between the subgroups blurred even further, to the extent that in later decades they could best be described not as Yakubi, Karakaş, and Kapancı, but as orthodox believers and assimilationists.

The Dönme Alteneuland: Turkey

The aspiration of the new Turkish elites to purify and homogenize the nation was systematically put in practice through the population exchange in 1923–1924. New Turkey to which the Dönmes were migrating was the place of origin for some, but things had changed radically in this old-new land (*altneuland*). After the population exchange, the portion of Anatolia that remained in the Ottoman Empire had about 13 million people, and more than 95 percent of them were Muslim; before World War I only 80 percent were Muslim. According to the Lausanne Treaty, the League of Nations was to establish a Mixed Commission for Population Exchange (Muhtelit Mübadele Komisyonu) consisting of four Greek, four Turkish, and three European delegates whose task was to monitor the exchange. On August 8 1923, Dönme Tevfik Rüştü [Aras] was elected head of the Turkish delegation, and Dönme Mustafa Arif [Deymer] was made the delegate representing the Turkish Red

⁴ Leyla Neyzi, “Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity, and Subjectivity in Turkey,” *Comparative Studies in Society & History* 44: 1 (2002): 137–158.

Crescent.⁵ The commission started its work on October 7, 1923, with the actual exchange getting under way in November and continuing until the deadline of October 1924. Eight regions were allocated for the resettlement of about 400,000 Turkish immigrants (as opposed to the nearly 1.4 million Orthodox Christians going to Greece). Two more regions were eventually added at the request of Minister of Exchange, Settlement, and Development Mustafa Necati (Necati was replaced by Celal [Bayar] on March 26, 1924).

Between mid-November and the end of December 1923, some 50,000 people had left Salonica and its vicinity, and by July 1924, the number had increased to 100,000. Some 30,000 persons from Drama and Kavala who were largely employed in the tobacco business were resettled in Region Number One, that is, Samsun. Another 4,000 people in the tobacco business, 20,000 in gardening-farming, and 40,000 in the olive business from Zeytuncu, Drama, Kavala, and Salonica were settled in Region Number Five, which consisted of Manisa, Izmir, Menteşe, Denizli, and their vicinities. Most of the Dönme immigrants were settled in different cities including Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Manisa, Denizli, Muğla, Bursa, Balıkesir, Samsun, Antalya, and Giresun. In the first or second generation, almost all of them migrated to and settled in Istanbul and Izmir. The estimated number of Dönme immigrants in this period was around 12,000–15,000. Dönmes who came from other Balkan cities such as Skopje, Monastir, Tirhala, Serez, and Crete, as well as the Dönmes who settled in Turkey before the population exchange were not included in this number.⁶ Perhaps still hoping to find a way to stay in Salonica, most of the Dönmes waited until the summer and fall of 1924 to leave the city. First, the Karakaş (e.g., the Kibar, Balçı, Karakaş, and Şamlı families), and after them, the Yakubis, and then the Kapancıs (e.g., families of Mehmet, Yusuf and Ahmet Kapancı, and Duhanı Hasan Akif) left Salonica for Istanbul.⁷

The population exchange did not proceed as smoothly as its planners had envisioned. A number of scholarly works, books of fiction, and memoirs tell the tragic stories of people who had been uprooted from their centuries-old habitations and implanted in a foreign place. The language barrier, poor planning, and corruption all contributed to making a traumatic situation worse. The death toll was very high due to poor hygienic conditions, pestilence, and epidemics. Ömer D. Tesal, who worked for the Mixed Commission, claims that the Greeks had been abusing and terrorizing the Turkish minority in Salonica since 1912, and this abuse increased during the exchange.⁸ The memoir of his

⁵ Other Turkish members were the Deputy for Erzincan Hamdi [?], Dr. Ömer Lütfü Bey, and Mehmet Esat [Atuner]. The head of the commission was the Spanish General Dolara. Şükrü Saracoğlu (later Turkish prime minister during World War II, 1887–1953) became the head of the Turkish delegation in 1926.

⁶ For example, the *Jewish Bulletin* claims that there were 15,000 “Donmeh” in Istanbul. *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, December 2, 1932, 3.

⁷ Baer, *The Dönme*, 152.

⁸ Ömer Tesal, “Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinin Geçmişinden bir Ömek: Azınlıkların Mübadelesi,” *Tarih ve Toplum* 9: 53 (1988): 46–52.

son, Reşat amply illustrates the tragedies experienced during the exchange.⁹ A family friend whose ancestors were part of the exchange told me that her grandfather had been an unruly man who caused a mutiny on the immigration ship on which he was being transported, due to the unfair treatment and bad conditions on the ship. Although they were supposed to disembark in Izmir, as a result of his disobedience, his family was punished and sent to Lara, east of Antalya, and given a piece of land in the middle of a swamp. In the meantime, according to a Greek newspaper, dated October 5, 1924, 1,200 Dönmes who did not want to be shipped to the Black Sea region rebelled against the authorities and managed to squeeze onto a ship to Istanbul.¹⁰

In principle, the immigrants on both sides were allowed to take their movable property with them. As for the immovable property, they were to prepare a list, have it endorsed by the Greek or Turkish authorities, and receive a similar property of the same value in their country of destination. As Baer shows, some of the Dönme families were so wealthy that they had to add several extra pages to the forms in listing their properties. For example, Karakaş Mehmet Şevket, Mehmet Nazif, and Süleyman Sıtkı [Dilber] added as many as six additional pages, listing stores, commercial buildings, and factories.¹¹ The state archive has thousands of these petitions, but how many were fully honored remains unclear. Those Dönmes who had powerful connections in the Mixed Commission or had families in large cities were often able to secure their transfer safely to Istanbul and Izmir and obtain valuable properties. For example, Fahri Talman, the son of former Salonican mayor Ahmet Hulusi Efendi, received a very large piece of land in the Söke meadow, for which he came to be known as the “Agha of Söke Meadow.”¹² Gökaçtı implies that those who had connections on the Mixed Commission received the better places in Anatolia, sometimes with fake documents.¹³ Even Reşat Tesal complains that the deserted properties in Istanbul were appropriated by only a few families who knew how to work the system.¹⁴ Overall, however, the Dönme oral tradition is full of stories indicating that most of the Dönmes did not get what they were promised in the population exchange.

In the Izmir area, the Dönmes preferred to settle in towns such as Karşıyaka, Bornova, Alsancak, and Konak. In Istanbul, the Karakaş were mainly settled in the Bakırköy, Bayezid, and Sultanahmet districts in the early years. It is believed that a Karakaş “synagogue” was located in the house of a rich man in

⁹ Tesal, *Selanik'ten İstanbul'a*, 66–68.

¹⁰ Cited in Orhan Turker, *Selanik'ten Thessaloniki'ye Unutulan Bir Kentin Hikayesi 1912–2012* (İstanbul: Sel, 2012), 54.

¹¹ Baer, *The Dönme*, 53.

¹² Tanman owned 23,000 dunams of land in Söke. He married his cousin Nazlı first, and later married Saffet, the daughter of a Sufi sheikh, in 1937, and had three sons: Selami, Ahmet Hulusi, and Bahâ, the latter of whom is a well-known art historian of the Sufi lodges.

¹³ For more, see Mehmet Gökaçtı, *Nüfus Mübadelesi* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2003).

¹⁴ Tesal's “Turk Yunan ilişkileri.”

Bakırköy.¹⁵ It is also believed that the temple housed Osman Baba's wax image or mummy. A late Kapancı gentleman who lived in Bakırköy until few years ago told me that a considerable number of Kapancıs lived in the town. Overall, the Kapancıs and Yakubis lived in scattered towns in the early days, but later, most of them moved to the Nişantaşı, Şişli, Teşvikiye, and Kuzguncuk neighborhoods. One reason they were drawn to the Teşvikiye and Şişli neighborhoods was the existence of the Şişli and Teşvikiye mosques, both of which were somehow similar to the New Mosque in Salonica. It has been claimed that the basement of the Teşvikiye mosque was used for special funeral ceremonies until the 1980s.¹⁶ Since then, it is believed that funeral ceremonies for the Orthodox are being held in houses, if possible in the special meeting house.

When they arrived in Turkey en masse, the Dönmes expanded the existing institutions that had been established by the pioneers and created new ones, including schools, hospitals (Tevsikiye Sağlık Evi), temples, meeting houses, and companies. Eminönü, Sultanahmet, and Sultan Hamam were the areas in which many of them worked. For example, Kibar Ali and his sons had their metal and hardware company in Eminönü, the Mehmet Balci Brothers had their company in Sultan Hamam, and they also did business with the extended family (the Karakaş, Kibar, Dilber, and Balci families).¹⁷ The international economic ties of the Bezmen, Kapancı, Kibar, and İpekçi families continued to grow, all signs that many of the Dönme families were adapting quickly and successfully to the new environment.

The subsects' visible and invisible institutions, such as meeting houses, schools, and cemeteries, may have still been separate, but the religious and social boundaries between the subgroups started to blur in the new mixed neighborhoods. Although the number of intermarriages among the different groups increased, it was still a major issue for the orthodox. One of the descendants of an important Yakubi family told me that her grandfather had refused Karakaş Mehmet Cavid's request to marry his daughter, saying that "their opinions are different than ours." In relation to the larger society, self-segregation in particular schools, clubs, and neighborhoods (including the newer gated communities such as Kemer County) continued as a mechanism for both survival and solidarity.

Dönmes as the Founding Elite of the Modern Turkey and Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]

In the 1920s, debates about the Dönmes and the alleged Dönme origin of Mustafa Kemal (founding father of the Modern Turkey, 1881–1938) reached beyond the borders of Turkey. In 1919, the *New York Times*

¹⁵ Münib Engin Noyan and Selma Türkis Noyan, *O-Ma* (İstanbul: Birun, 1999), 245–246.

¹⁶ From the outside, the neo-baroque style of the Tesvikiye mosque (built 1854) is somewhat reminiscent of Salónica's New Mosque, but its interior is entirely different. The verse on the prayer niche (Qur'an 3/39) is different as well: "the angels called him [Zechariah] while he was standing in prayer in the chamber."

¹⁷ Baer, *The Dönme*, 191.

published a short article on the Dönmes, explaining that “the Donmeh are a sect of cryptographic-Jews, descendants of the followers of the cabalistic, visionary and mystic Shabbahati Zebi, living mainly in Salonica . . . divided in three groups. . . . [F]ormerly members of these groups did not intermarry. . . . [I]n recent times, however, the endeavor is to make mixed marriages. . . . [T]heir rabbis, besides being well versed in holy Scriptures, are proficient in the Kabbala, and understand Judeo-Spanish which they regard as a holy language.”¹⁸ Likewise, rumors about Mustafa Kemal were already in circulation in those years. The *Times* of London states: “Mustafa Kemal, reported by some to be of Salonika Jewish descent, only joined the Nationalist movement openly in June 1919.”¹⁹

An interesting document dated 1922 from the American Immigration Service gives us more detail on the claims about Mustafa Kemal’s alleged Dönme origin.²⁰ Trying to explain how the Turks were of mixed race, Doctor Kalaidjian, an Armenian immigrant from Turkey, told the American immigration officers that “Mustapha Kemal Pasha is a Spanish Jew, who has become a Mohammedan. His father was Jewish, a Jewish convert. Kemal Pasha is a Mohammedan now, but so far as his blood is concerned, his is a Spanish Jew. He has blue eyes and light hair. There is nothing Turkish about him.” After a long discussion about race, ethnicity, and religion, the officer asked him again about “the nativity and racial character of the present ruler of the Turks.” He said: “I have an article written by a Turk in this country, and in that article it says that Mustapha Kemal is of Jewish origin, that he is from Saloniki and there are a good many Mohammedans in Saloniki, like Kemal Pasha and others, who have been very prominent in the Young Turk movement. Mostly they are what they call ‘Durnemat,’ that is converted. They converted years ago, but nevertheless, like the Armenians, they are of other blood but they have been converted and became Mohammedans. So after they became Mohammedans in Turkey, nationality is not based on race, it is religion. If I decide to become a Mohammedan today, they would call me a Turk, not a Mohammedan.” At the end of his statement, Kalaidjian repeated that “everyone knows that Mustapha Pasha is of Jewish origin.”

Only a month after this conversation, a short article on Mustafa Kemal appeared in the *Literary Digest*, with a subtitle of “A Spanish Jew by ancestry, an orthodox Muslim by birth and breeding.”²¹ Calling him the “Napoleon of the Near East,” the author based his article on the observations of Achmet Abdullah and Leo Anavi that were published by the North American Newspaper Alliance (New York). Unfortunately, I could not find the article, but I did find that its

¹⁸ “A Strange Sect in Salonici,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1919.

¹⁹ “The Break-up of Turkey,” *Times History of the War*, 21 (London: The Times, 1920), 433.

²⁰ *Admission of Near East Refugees, Hearing before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House of Representatives*. Sixty-Seventh Congress. Fourth Session. September 15, 16, and 19, 1922. Serial 1-C (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1923), 148–149.

²¹ “A Sort of Man Mustafa Kemal Is,” *Literary Digest*, 75:2 (October 14, 1922): 50–52.

authors were quite interesting. Achmed Abdullah was none other than Alexander Nicholayevitch Romanoff (1881–1945) who was born into a mixed Russian-Afghan family. His father, Grand Duke Nicholas Romanoff, was a cousin of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and his mother, Princess Nourmahal Durani, was the daughter the amir of Afghanistan. After being raised Muslim, he converted to Christianity and migrated to the United States in the 1920s. He was a famous novelist, short story writer, playwright, and editor of the *Chicago Daily News*. After his education at Oxford, he served in the British Indian Army and later in the Turkish Army in the first Balkan War as a British spy, attaining the rank of colonel. Among other works, he wrote the famous novel, *The Thief of Bagdad*. Mr. Anavi was the grandson of a high official in the Turkish army. In the summer of 1922, these two interesting men participated in a dinner party at Mustafa Kemal's house and published their observations in another article on September 28, 1922, almost ten days after Doctor Kalaidjian's account.²² According to these author, “the night was quite gay and cosmopolitan,” and the pasha was “tall, still young, good-looking, narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered, with gray, rather sad eyes that spoke eloquently of his Spanish-Jewish ancestry.” Two years later, another article on Mustafa Kemal appeared in the *American Jewish Year Book*, right after the abolition of the caliphate:

The abolition of the Caliphate in Turkey served as a starting point for a great anti-Jewish propaganda in Anatolia and other Mohammedan countries. Newspapers appearing in Caucasia and Anatolia leveled at the Jews the absurd charge that the Turks known as Donmah, whose forefathers belonged to the Shabbatai Zebi sect, have striven for the abolition of the Caliphate and that they, together with the supporters of Mustapha Kemal Pasha, who is likewise of Jewish descent, brought about the abolition of the Caliphate.²³

These accounts show that allegations about Mustafa Kemal's origin were not only discussed by the Islamists who were upset with his over-secularization efforts but were rumored in various circles before he became the undisputed leader of the Turkish Revolution. This is not the place to discuss Mustafa Kemal's origin in depth, but it suffices to say that speculation continues about certain aspects of his life, by those who both liked and disliked him: his attendance at Şemsi Efendi's school (if this was indeed true); his encounter with Itamar Ben Zwi in Tel Aviv in 1911, when he reportedly recited the Jewish prayer, *shema israel*; the possible Dönme origin of his wife Latife Hanım and his close friendship with Dönmes (such as Nuri Conker, 1882–1037); and reasons of his silence on these matters until he died. According to Cemal Granda, who served him for twelve years, Mustafa Kemal is reported to have said: “Some people seem to think that I was of a Salonican and therefore Jewish origin. Don't forget that Napoleon was of Corsican origin, Italian, as well. But

²² Achmed Abdullah, “The Rise of Mustapha Kemal Pasha from Obscurity,” *Bridgeport Telegram*, September 28, 1922, 4.

²³ Cited in Bali, *Scapegoat*, 241.

he died as a French man and history remembers him as being French. Everyone needs to work for the society in which they live.”²⁴ Based on similar reports and traditions—behind doors, of course—the Dönmes and Jews continue to take pride in him and suggest that he was “one of our kind,” and the Islamists continue to blame him as a radical anti-Islamist and claim that he was “one of their kind.” As Turkey continues to debate its own identity, Ataturk’s family origin will probably continue to be discussed. As of now, however, our knowledge is not adequate to let us reach a conclusion on the issue.²⁵ However, the secular nation-state that Mustafa Kemal and his like-minded allies were about to establish would be a new contested abode for the Dönmes.

New “Ideal” Citizens and Crypto-Identities

The odyssey of leaving the historical center of Dönme existence and settling in a new “holy” place triggered new discussions about the Dönme identity in Turkey and abroad. While many of the Dönmes were debating whether they should keep their “secret identities” in the new secular nation-state, some Turks questioned their loyalty to both Islam and Turkey. The result of these debates, going on both within and outside the communities, set the tone for Dönme existence in the Turkish Republic. In the end, all became “good standing” secular Turkish citizens on the public level, but in private some of them kept their ethnic and religious crypto-identity; others kept only the ethnic identity; and still others assimilated in varying degrees into the greater society. The orthodox, reformist, and assimilationist streams continue to exist, with an increasing tendency toward assimilation.

But why were the Dönmes placed under greater scrutiny than any other ethnic or religious group in terms of identity and loyalty in the early years of the Republic? There were crypto-Armenians and Christians in other parts of Anatolia, but they did not get the same attention. For example, the crypto-community of Vallaades/Vallahades (the name given them since they are reported to have used the word *vallahi*, by God, very often), whose experience showed a striking resemblance to that of the Dönmes, was passed over in silence. Members of this community lived in Macedonia and Salonica and converted to Islam in the eighteenth century, probably to avoid paying the *jizya*. They retained their old religious beliefs but maintained them in private; they frequented the Bektashi lodges, spoke Greek among themselves, and petitioned to be exempted from the population exchange. Similar to the Dönme case, their petition was turned down by the Greek government and they came to settle in Turkey as “regular citizens.” Probably as a precaution, they called

²⁴ Cemal Granda, *Atatürk’ün Uşağınn Gizli Defteri* (Istanbul: Kent, 2012).

²⁵ For more on the speculation about Ataturk’s ethnic origin, see Rifat Bali, “Mustafa Kemal and the Claim of His Dönme Roots,” in Bali, *Scapegoat*, 249–277. Hilel Halkin, “When Ataturk Recited *Shema Yisrael*,” *Forward*, January 28, 1994; Ara Papian, “Some Facts on the Origins of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk,” in *HetzOnOnline*, accessed February 9, 2011.

themselves Patriyots after they moved to Turkey.²⁶ Yet, no public mention of them seems to have been made in the early years of the Republic.

Therefore, it was not only the Dönmes' crypto-beliefs and practices that made them objects of curiosity and scorn, but their actual and imagined political and economic power in Salonica and then in the early Republic that brought them to attention. Had the Dönmes, or Sabbatai, chosen another town as the center of their activities at the beginning, their historical trajectories could have been much different.

The debate on the Dönmes in Istanbul had already started before the mass migration, and suspicions about them can still be heard among contemporary Turkish nationalists and Islamists. In 1919, the historian Ahmet Refik wrote that while the Turks suffered in recent wars, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Dönmes became wealthy. What is more, the Dönmes had deceived the Turks by disguising their true selves with an Islamic façade.²⁷ In those years, Ahmed Safi wrote a treatise, contained in his multi-topic manuscript with the main aim of demonstrating that the Dönmes were endogamic, nepotistic, hypocritical, pragmatic, dishonest, disloyal, and, most important, anti-Islamic (*fırka-yı dalle*, or deviated group).²⁸

Two treatises published in 1919, titled *Dönmeler: Hunyos [Karakas], Kavayeros [Kapancı], Sazan [Yakubij]* and *Dönmeliğin Hakikati*, helped to make the term Dönme a part of everyday language in Turkey.²⁹ The identity of the first tract's author is unknown, but he clearly had some intimate knowledge of the group. The author saw the Dönme as physically, biologically, mentally, morally, and racially different from the Turks. His further claims were that their centuries-long practice of endogamy had caused a number of degenerative diseases to become common among them, including tuberculosis, mental disorders, and anemia. Their women, like those of Christian Europe, went unveiled and were thus a bad influence on Muslim women. They were blamed for spreading immorality, atheism, corruption, and treachery among Ottoman society. They did not consider others to be fully human, and that's why they did not hesitate to engage in illegal business. They had their own legal

²⁶ Clark, *Twice as Stranger*, 158–180. Also F.W. Hasluck, "Christian Survivals among Certain Subjects of Greece," *Contemporary Review* 125 (1924): 225–232.

²⁷ Cited in Baer, *The Dönme*, 136.

²⁸ Safi completed his manuscript only after his retirement in 1913. The manuscript contains sections on history, religion, politics, Sufism, literature, and personal memoirs. Düzdağ argues that Safi's treatise on the Dönmes were written in 1878–1879 and inserted into the manuscript later. Safi, *Dönmeler Adedi*, 8. But on p. 27, Safi refers to the Salonica city wall, saying that the "Dönmes have been waiting for the second coming of the messiah at the city gates. But these walls and gates were destroyed by the governor Sabri Pasha some sixty years ago." The walls were torn down in 1866, and Safi must have written this sentence in the 1920s. Even if Safi took some notes while he was in Salonica, it seems that he rewrote them later, with new concerns in mind.

²⁹ Anonymous, *Dönmeler* (Istanbul: n.p., 1919); Binbaşı Sadık, *Dönmeliğin Hakikati* (Istanbul: n.p., 1919). These texts were rendered into Latin alphabets and discussed several times by different researchers. See, for example, Küçük, *Dönmeler Tarihi*, 467–480; Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Yakın Tarihimizde Dönmelik ve Dönmeler* (İstanbul: Zwi: 2003); Ahmet Almaz, *Tarihin Esrarengiz Bir Sayfası* (İstanbul: Kultur Yayıncılık, 2002), 57–99; and Baer, *The Dönme*, 121–135.

system and courts, and they kept order within their community by implementing the harshest of measures against members who transgressed the community's laws. Similar to Ahmed Safi, the author also claimed that they punished culprits among them by forcing them to attend mosque for a time. They pretended to fast, but in fact they did not. They had their own secret temples, imams, cemeteries, and special burial ceremonies. Because of all of these differences, they were not to be trusted.

A rebuttal to *Dönmeler* appeared soon after its appearance, written by a retired soldier, who referred to himself as Binbaşı (Major) Sadık. Major Sadık stated that it was his love for his fatherland that compelled him to write the treatise, without asking anyone's help or opinion. Sadık first criticized the excessive secularization and decreasing religiosity among the general public. He asserted that all the big mosques in Istanbul were empty, and then rhetorically asked: "Is this because of the Dönmes?" He praised the piety of Aziz Mehmed (i.e., Sabbatai Sevi), and said that Sabbatai brought many people to Islam.³⁰ Aziz Mehmed's eccentric behaviors derived from his mystical Sufi personality, something that was entirely within the tradition of Ibn Arabi or al-Hallaj. He also claimed that endogamy was a limited practice among the Dönmes.

Sadık also referred to one of the most controversial Dönme practices, explaining that, in earlier times, they would celebrate the Festival of the Lamb on the evening of March 21.³¹ As Baer rightly points out, this mention of extramarital sex during the Festival in a treatise devoted to defending Dönme morality could not help but harm the groups' reputation.³² Sadık mentioned the burial practices and Rabbi Ari (i.e., Isaac Luria), who began the practice of purifying the dead, although it was not found in the Torah and other traditions. Sadık's knowledge of Lurianic ideas and of Judaism is suspiciously rich for a simple Ottoman soldier, strongly suggesting that Major Sadık was a Dönme, perhaps a traditionalist one at that. In sum, Sadık portrayed the Dönmes as pious Muslims, loyal Turks, and good citizens. In his defense of the Dönme, however, he acknowledged the existence of parallel practices and places among them, but also said that these practices had long since passed into history. Indeed, that was a principal defense of the several Dönme apologists who published during this period.

Repositioning in a Nation-State: Mustafa Kemal's "bomb of Enlightenment" and the Karakaş Rüştü Affair

Despite the two aforementioned tracts and debates about Mustafa Kemal's family origin in the West, the question of the Dönme (and even public knowledge of them) remained relatively limited until Karakaşzade Mehmed Rüştü

³⁰ Sadık, *Dönmeliğin Hakikati*, 6.

³¹ Sadık, *Dönmeliğin Hakikati*, 25.

³² Baer, *The Dönme*, 131.

Efendi sent a petition first to the Turkish Parliament and subsequently to Mustafa Kemal in January 1, 1924. The petition, sent just as the population exchange was getting under way, sparked a long-running public debate, January 1924 was being the most intensive time. Actors of these debates were the Dönmes from the three subgroups and non-Dönmes who were either curious or critical of this “mysterious” community. While the secular Turkish nation-state and its new identity was in the making, the Dönmes had been constantly deliberating on whether to break their *burden of silence*. In Karakaş Rüştü’s term, Mustafa Kemal’s “bomb of Enlightenment” changed the course of the Dönme history forever. Because Rüştü’s petition and its aftermath directly affected the fate of the Dönmes in the new Republic, I have examined this affair, which took place between 1924 and 1928, in detail. That was also the time when the term Dönme began to be replaced by the term “Salonicans (*Selanikliler*).” Rüştü (1880–1926?) was a graduate of the Feyziye School who became a merchant and owned stores in Salonica, Istanbul, and Berlin. In his petition, his stated aim was twofold: to make the Turks aware of the Dönmes’ double life, and to convince the Dönme to end their secret life and embrace their new Turkish identity. The petition triggered a lengthy debate in the press that was reported by or commented on in many of the leading dailies, including *Türk Sesi*, *Vakit*, *Vatan*, *Akşam*, *İleri Tanın*, *Tevhid-i Efkâr*, *Sebilürreşad*, *Resimli Dünya*, *Resimli Gazete*, *Mihrab*, and *Son Saat*.³³ Even then, only a small portion of the inner debates that had been taking place among the Dönmes themselves were leaked to the newspapers and journals.

The story began with the appearance of Rüştü’s petition in *Yenigün* (published by Yunus Nadi) on January 1, 1924. The next day a short entry by a certain İhsan appeared in *Vakit* (published by Ahmet Emin [Yalman] until 1923, afterward by M. Asım Us) that inaugurated the long debate. İhsan’s opening interrogative question—“What, if anything do the Salonican Dönmes have to do with Turkishness?”—lit the fuse of the Dönme affair.³⁴

In the following days, interviews with Rüştü and Dönme-related news were in all of the major newspapers. In his interviews, Rüştü reiterated his main points, that the Dönmes had been crypto-Jews all along and they had been deceiving the Turks for centuries. For some, Rüştü’s motivation was seen as genuine; others suspected that he was being paid by certain Turks. Yet others believed that his motivation was strictly personal, that he just wanted to take revenge against his own people after having been expelled from the community at the age of thirty.

³³ For an early debate on the Rüştü affair, see W. Gordlevsky, “Zur Frage Über die ‘Dönme,’” *Islamica* 2 (1926): 200–218. Gordolevsky was able to peruse only a few issues of *Vakit* and *Vatan*, and none of the other newspapers, so his knowledge of the issue was quite sketchy. For a contemporary discussion of the Rüştü affair, see Küçük, *Dönme Tarihi*, 481–530; Paul Bessemér, “Who Is a Crypto-Jew? A Historical Survey of the Sabbatean Debate in Turkey,” *Kabbalah* 9 (2003): 109–153; and Baer, *The Dönme*, 157–167.

³⁴ *Vakit*, January 2, 1924.

On January 4, *Akşam* (published by Necmettin Sadak) reprinted Rüştü's petition to the Turkish Parliament in full, also mentioning that a similar petition had been submitted to the Greek Parliament. The Greeks were reported to have considered the Dönmes "a thousand times more dangerous than the Turks," and rejected their request to remain in Salonica.³⁵ An anonymous writer at *İkdam* (published by Ahmet Cevdet) claimed that the Dönmes were neither Turks nor Muslims. They had enriched themselves immensely by cheating the Turks, and therefore the Parliament should exclude them from the Exchange, since the Exchange was based on "race" in such a way that even the Albanian Muslims were not included in it.³⁶ On the same day, reporters from *İleri* (published by Celal Nuri [İleri]) quoted Rüştü's sons, who were angry and upset with their father and claimed that his opinions were not representative of the Dönme at all.³⁷ Ahmet Emin [Yalman]'s *Vatan* was the first to mention Rüştü's "mental" and "personal problems." The *Vatan* article, whose author was most likely Yakubi Ahmed Emin himself, claimed that there had indeed been such a community in Salonica and that they used to have ridiculous customs similar to those that could be found only in the "primitive tribes in Australia and Tasmania"; but with the development of science and technology, most of these customs had already disappeared. Presently, the community had fully assimilated into Turkish society, and, he wrote, had produced a number of national heroes, like Osman Nevres (known also as Hasan Tahsin) and the head of the Military Health Division, Şükrü Bey.³⁸

On January 5, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın (1875–1957), a Mason, possibly a Dönme himself,³⁹ and editor-in-chief of *Tanin*, wrote a lengthy article attempting to refute Rüştü's "absurd" and "weird" claims. In defense of the "Salonicans" (by this time, the Dönmes were generally called "Salonicans" [Selanikliler]), he said that "nationality is more a matter of culture (*hars*) and feeling. That's why a Muslim who has Albanian or Arab blood can very well be a pure and altruistic Turk." The Salonicans spoke Turkish, and unlike other ethnic groups within the empire, had never harbored separatist political ambitions. As far as their religion was concerned, some of them used to embrace "superstitious" beliefs, but with the advance of education and civilization, these things were already disappearing. Their patriotism, moral character, integrity, and service to the country were said to be unquestionable. Therefore it was irrational to ask for their exclusion from the population exchange.⁴⁰ On the same day, an anonymous *Vatan* author published a letter by one of Rüştü's relatives who wished to remain anonymous. According to the letter, Rüştü had been struggling with economic problems and two bitter divorces. He had applied for a

³⁵ *Akşam*, January 4, 1924.

³⁶ *İkdam*, January 4, 1924.

³⁷ *İleri*, January 4, 1924.

³⁸ *Vatan*, January 4, 1924.

³⁹ He was buried in the Ferikoy Dönme cemetery.

⁴⁰ *Tanin*, January 5, 1924.

job in one of the Turkish government's embassies so that he could remain outside the country. That was the reason he went to Ankara. By no means, the letter added, was he representative of the Salonicans; he represented no one but himself. After quoting the letter, the author said that some of Rüştü's claims had been true in the past, but these practices had already disappeared. Then he suggested that Rüştü's true intention in telling the Turks to reject his community was to exclude the Dönmes from the population exchange. "Otherwise what sane person would say that 'we have cheated you for centuries, we have sucked your blood, so now keep us separate from you'!" Last the author asked: "Is it correct to call someone a 'Dönme' whose ancestors converted two centuries ago? If we go further back in history, then everyone is Dönme!"⁴¹ This would also explain why *Vakit* and *Tanin* did not use the term Dönme but Selanikli, indicating the Yakubi position on the matter. Examination of the Republican archive catalogue indicates that the term Selanikli, which refers to geographic origin, and Dönme, which refers to any convert, were used interchangeably by Turkish officials in the early 1920s.

On January 6, 1924, Subhi Nuri [İleri] wrote in his article for *İleri*, "Being a Republican, Being a Dönme, Being a Greek" (Cumhurculuk, Dönmelik, Rumluk), that the most pressing issue was to strengthen the Republic and not to waste time on the Dönme question. To him, race and nation were two different things, and the Dönmes were not Turks:

It is our job to Turkify people who came to Turkey. . . . Recently it is being heard that the Dönmes wanted to remain in Salonica. If that is the case, let them stay there. If they don't want us, we should in no way want them either. Let's deal with only those who are already in Turkey and Turkify them. . . . [I]t is wrong to waste so much time on the Dönme affair, while the bigger issue of the "Greek menace" remains unresolved. Protected by the Lausanne Treaty, the number of Greeks who are acquiring French, Italian, and English passports is growing in Istanbul and Anatolia.⁴²

On the same page of *İleri*, another anonymous piece gives a more skeptical interpretation of the "real" aims of Rüştü's petition and Mustafa Efendi's petition to the Greek Parliament. Like Ahmet Emin, he sees their shared goal as securing the exclusion of the Dönmes from the population exchange.

On January 7, *Vakit* reported that the Turkish Grand National Assembly had closed discussion of the matter. Similar to *İleri*'s argument, the author asserted that the "real" agenda behind Rüştü's attempt was to have the Turkish Parliament reject the Dönme request, and then to apply to the Greek Parliament to have them excluded from the exchange. On the same page, we see Rüştü's open letter to the Dönmes.⁴³ After denying all the allegations about himself, Rüştü calls his "brethren" to give up their centuries-old dissimulation

⁴¹ *Vatan*, January 5, 1924.

⁴² *İleri*, January 6, 1924.

⁴³ *Vakit*, January 7, 1924.

and join the Turkish nation. “Now,” he says, “it is the time to integrate or leave.” Meanwhile, *Vatan* published Rüştü’s letter to Mustafa Kemal, wherein he faulted the Ottoman system for not having managed to create a unified identity for its citizens. He also said that the time to do so had now come. He asked Mustafa Kemal to resolve the Dönme issue and not to let them continue to live as they had been, since that would negatively impact the formation of a homogeneous Turkish identity. If invited, Rüştü wrote, he could share more detailed knowledge about the Dönmes with Mustafa Kemal.⁴⁴ We do not know Mustafa Kemal’s response, but from another newspaper, we learn that the petition was transferred to the Office of the Prime Minister.⁴⁵ On the same day, the editor of *Vakit* called on the Assembly to make an inquiry about the Salonicans before the population exchange actually took place, arguing that if the Salonicans asked the Greek Parliament to allow them to stay in Greece, there was no use in bringing them to Turkey. It seems that Tevfik Rüştü [Aras], who was the head of the Mixed Commission, denied the news about the Dönme attempts to remain in Greece, since the editor says that the commission head’s testimony was not enough to disprove the claim. The editor also claims that the population exchange was based on religious identity.⁴⁶ It seems that the criteria for inclusion in the exchange were somewhat confusing for many people. In retrospect, we can tell that for the Greeks, the main criterion was religion, and that’s why they included the Turkish-speaking Greek Orthodox Karamanlı community in the exchange; and for the Turks, it was both religion and race, and that’s why Albanian Muslims were excluded from being brought to Turkey.

For some reason *Vakit* newspaper showed the greatest interest into the debate. On January 8, Hüseyin Necati [Çiller] from *Vakit*, dug deeper into Dönme beliefs and practices. He quoted extensively from his interview with Rüştü, who talked about special Dönme prayers, temples, festivals (including the controversial Festival of the Lamb), “Allah’s burned house,”⁴⁷ and the like. The interviewer drew very sophisticated conclusions from the interview, making one wonder whether he had already known a great deal about the Dönme tradition even before interviewing Rüştü.⁴⁸ He asserted that there were three groups of Dönmes: the first group was fully Jewish, relatively ignorant and unlearned, traditional in its beliefs and practices, and having prayers

⁴⁴ *Vatan*, January 7, 1924.

⁴⁵ *Vakit*, January 8, 1924.

⁴⁶ *Vakit*, January 7, 1924.

⁴⁷ It probably refers to the house of Osman Baba, which was burned down in the 1917 fire. Rüştü tells that everyone had brought their jewelry to the house during the fire, assuming that the house would be “protected.” The believers reinterpreted this failure of the prophecy, claiming that the house was burned due to their sins.

⁴⁸ Born in 1898 and graduated from the Imperial Civil Service School (Mülkiye) in 1915, Necati married Muazzez Hanım from Salonica in the 1920s. He served as governor in several different cities. His daughter, Tansu Çiller, would eventually become Turkey’s first female prime minister in the mid-1990s.

in Judeo-Spanish (Yahudice). The second group was enlightened and did not pay attention to the superstition, but at the same time its members did not mingle with the Turks. They were mindful of their own interests. As for the third group—it was the smallest of the three; it was the one that had become fully Turk. The combined population of all three groups was about 15,000, and of these the third group could be counted only in the hundreds. Hüseyin Necati's classification roughly corresponds with my own categorization of the Dönmes in the twentieth century into traditionalists, reformists, and assimilationists. The author concluded that Rüştü was a sincere Dönme who had been working for the well-being of the group as a whole.⁴⁹

On January 9, the daily *Aksam* published another letter from Rüştü, who denied all the personal accusations made against him, claiming that he had been contemplating these issues since the age of fifteen and only now felt comfortable enough to talk about them.⁵⁰

On January 10, *Vakit* published an even a longer letter from Rüştü, in which he went over all the arguments about the Dönmes and the personal attacks on himself, and attempted a point-by-point rebuttal. Most of his efforts were devoted to countering the claims made in *Vatan* and *Tanin*. Among other things, he stated that “the primitive beliefs and practices . . . still exist among the Dönmes, and at least half of them still believe in them.” Alluding to the *burden of silence* that he and his fellow Dönmes had been forced to endure, he claimed that “this deep-seated torture for over two-and-a-half centuries had harmed this tribe’s mental state.” Last he proposed that the Dönme elders form a committee and take a poll among their communities, asking the members whether they still wanted to retain “the past.”⁵¹ The response, he was certain, would be a resounding “no.” On the very same day, *Vatan* announced that it was going to publish the notes of a “young man” on the history and inner structure of a tribe that had thrived in Salonica for over 250 years. This young man, who used the pen name of “bir tarih müdekkiki (a curious historian),” was no other than Yakubi Ahmet Emin [Yalman], who was the first Turkish recipient of a Ph.D. in sociology at Columbia University (1915). In his series of articles, published in ten installments between January 11 and 22, which could be considered the first monograph on Sabbatai Sevi and Sabbateans in Turkish, Yalman basically accepted the existence of the “Salonican community” but argued that it had passed into oblivion with the advance of science and education in the Ottoman Empire. The beliefs and practices were being kept alive by only a few old men.⁵² Ironically, like Rüştü, Yalman blamed Ottoman pluralism and tolerance for not unifying

⁴⁹ *Vakit*, January 8, 1924.

⁵⁰ *Vakit*, January 9, 1924.

⁵¹ *Vakit*, January 10, 1924.

⁵² Ahmet Emin Yalman (Bir Tarih Müdekkiki). “Tarihin Esrarengiz Bir Sahifesi (A Mysterious Page from History),” *Vatan*, January 11–22, 1924.

Turkish identity. Now it was time for the nation-state to impose an identity on its people and homogenize the culture. It is also interesting to see that all those who spoke of the Dönme community's history unequivocally claimed that it was science, technology, and modern education that had brought their tradition to an end.

In explaining the idiosyncrasies of the Salonicans, Yalman argued that the community of 200 families found themselves in disarray after the death of Sabbatai. They survived as a group not because of internal homogeneity but because of external pressure. Animosity toward these "tribes" was so strong that it was impossible to have social connections with outsiders. They married among themselves and developed an idiosyncratic lifestyle, similar to other primitive endogamic tribes. It was a "ridiculous nightmare," but it is over now. The young generation was different, revolutionary, innovative, modern, secular, well traveled, well educated, and open to intermarriage. He then stated that whatever Rüştü's intention was, it created an opportunity to eradicate the remaining parts of the "nightmare."

On January 12, *Akşam* interviewed the first Turkish chief rabbi, Haim Be-carano, a close friend of Mustafa Kemal. Be-carano said that he did not have enough knowledge about the "Salonicans." When he was in Edirne, he says, he made some inquiries through Ibrahim Efendi, the tobacco merchant—supposedly a Dönme—but received little information. He also added that their beliefs were "partly" contrary to Jewish beliefs. Be-carano, at the end, mentioned a strange conversion story in Hungary, and concluded that "those who convert surely must have some kind of interest."⁵³ This statement is, obviously, his subtle critique of the Dönmes. Expectedly, his answers reflect a typically official attitude of the Ottoman-Turkish Jews toward the Dönmes. Unlike the Askenazi rabbis, the Sephardic Ottoman rabbis chose a form of *the burden of silence* on the topic, despite the inherent Sabbatean challenge to their religious authority. Until today, despite their close interest into the subject, the Turkish Chief Rabbinate refrains from making any comment on the Dönme issue.

On January 13, *Vakit* published an anonymous letter indicating that credit for opening up the Dönme tradition to discussion should have been given to another young man, Rasim Haşmet, who, after the 1908 revolution, published a series of critical poems in the weekly *Kadın*. The letter also completes our earlier knowledge about Haşmet (see Chapter 7). Apparently he had to leave his family due his "revolutionary" character; he worked as a literature teacher first in Izmir then in Konya Sultanisi, and last in Gelenbevi Sultanisi where he died in 1918.

On January 14, while Yalman's articles were still in progress, another article series in seven installments on the Dönmes began to be published in *Türk Sesi* by an author under the pen name of Ebu'l Mecdet. Unlike Yalman,

⁵³ *Akşam*, January 12, 1924.

the author takes a much more neutral and sometimes even sympathetic position towards the Dönmes. As I deal with this short monograph somewhere else, here it suffices to say that the author provides us with important information on the Dönmes religious and daily lives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁴

On January 15, *Mihrab* published the translation of a French article claiming that the Dönmes were behind the Young Turk and Turkish Revolutions.⁵⁵ This argument was one of the most widely used accusations against the Dönmes by the Islamists and some nationalists, continuing to the present.

Ihsan Arif penned two more articles on January 17 and 18 in *Aksam*; in these, he quoted extensively from Rüştü, who reportedly said that he was “excommunicated” by the Dönmes fifteen years earlier, and that he hated them. The next day’s article claimed that Rüştü had begun getting “death threats.” On January 24, Ihsan Arif reported that Rüştü had married the daughter of a Turkish grocer. On January 28, in a rebuttal especially against Yalman, who argued that Kapancı and Yakubis did not have any functioning organization, Rüştü said that “not only old people but also many young Dönmes believe in those superstitions.” After these interviews, Rüştü became silent or was silenced. Rumor has it that half-Kapancı Ilgaz Zorlu, who triggered a new chain of discussion on the Dönme tradition, after almost seventy years, in the 1990s, had also been silenced by several “threats.”

As the country was in the middle of the Turkish Revolution, the Dönme affair receded into the background for more than a year. Karakaş Meziyet Hanım’s sensationalist story in *Resimli Dünya* (written by Esat Mahmut) rekindled the Dönme debate. She claimed that she was not allowed to marry the man she loved; instead, as their tradition required, she was forced to have illicit sexual relations with her relatives. A few days later, in a long, less sensational letter, an anonymous young Kapancı man declared that he wanted to finish the process that had been “initiated by Rüştü Karakaş and then continued by Meziyet Hanım.” After giving his version of Dönme history, he provided details about Dönme life, such as the place of Osman Baba’s bust in Bakırköy, having special festivals, the Karakaş obligation of greeting another Karakaş before anyone else every morning, praying in Hebrew, having special festivals, praying seven nights consecutively after someone dies, and observing the notorious Lamb Festival.⁵⁶

In the same year, upon the discovery of a prayer book which was stuck to a student notebook in one of the primary schools, an anonymous author wrote another lengthy article on the double life led by the Dönmes, which appeared

⁵⁴ Ebu'l Mecdet, “Sabatayistlik: Şimdiye kadar mestur kalan hakayık-1 tarihiyyeden (Sabbateanism: Historical Truths hitherto Shrouded in Mystery,” *Türk Sesi*, nos. 195-203, 14–22 Kanunisani 1340 (January 14–22, 1924). With Muhamrem Varol, we are preparing this series for publication.

⁵⁵ Jean Brunhes and Camille Vallaus, *La Geographie de L'Historie* (Paris: n.p., 1921), 594–596.

⁵⁶ Sisman, “The Dönme Affair,” 829–833.

in the weekly *Resimli Gazete* (published by Zekeriya and Sabiha Sertel). This author asks:

Are these people the fourth ethnicity, along with the Greeks, Armenians and Jews? Why are they segregating themselves? Why do they still have special prayers and spiritual leaders? What is the meaning of teaching Hebrew and Ladino prayers to their children?

The prayer, according to the author, starts, “Beşami barohya ilen Sabatay Sevi es Sabatay Sevi etno doloz mondos,” and continues with the Song of the Songs. One of the “non-secretive” Dönmes told the author that they had to memorize those kinds of prayers in their childhood. These accounts prove that the Dönme tradition was still alive and well. The author finds it hard to believe that a community that has many smart, enlightened, and scientific-minded people, succumbs to these secret ridiculous beliefs and practices. Even if they are practiced by a small group of people, it is still a concern for the general public. Therefore, the author says, it is the time for the Dönmes to change their tradition once and for all.⁵⁷

The author was most likely Alaattin Gövsa, principal of the Karakaş Boarding School for Girls in Bakırköy in 1924–1925, at which time he discovered a prayer book, placed in the notebook of one of the students. Like Rüştü, Gövsa also believed that the Dönme tradition did not die out completely, but he did not express his opinions publicly until 1937; at that time he wrote a newspaper series and then the first Turkish book on the subject.⁵⁸ Although Gövsa was a friend of Ahmet Emin, he criticized *Vatan*, saying it was published by a group of Dönmes and that it was misleading, not telling the truth about the subject. To prove that the tradition was not dead, he refers to the student’s prayer book he found. Trying to strengthen his testimonial, he adds that “there are some very intelligent and worthy Dönmes—some of them are my friends—who play important roles in the nation’s economic and intellectual life.”⁵⁹ In explaining the Dönme lifestyle, he claimed that “internal religious reasons”—and loyalty to the Eighteen Commandments in particular—compelled them to guard their distinctiveness.⁶⁰ This observation is another way of explaining the internal religious mechanism of the *burden of silence*.

From 1925 onward, most of the coverage about the Dönmes appeared in the daily *Son Saat* (published by Hakkı Tarık Us; Asım Us, who formerly published *Vakit*; and Selim Ragıp between 1925 and 1929). Karakaş Rüştü appeared again, but this time with an almost completely reversed opinion. On November 26, 1925, Rüştü sent a letter to *Son Saat*, expressing his disappointment with the letters of Meziyet Hanım and the young Dönme whose accounts were “full of absurdities.” He claimed that his efforts two years earlier

⁵⁷ *Resimli Gazete*, no. 116 (1925).

⁵⁸ Gövsa’s book, *Sabatay Sevi*, was a compilation of his articles published in the weekly *Yedigün* (April 1937).

⁵⁹ Gövsa, *Sabatay Sevi*, 6.

⁶⁰ Gövsa, *Sabatay Sevi*, 83.

had yielded positive results among the Dönmes, and as a result almost all the superstitious practices and beliefs among them had been abandoned. There was no one left who read Hebrew or talked about Osman Baba's mummy. He said that the entire community should not be blamed because of a few ignorant believers, and that Mustafa Kemal's "bomb of Enlightenment" had "exploded" the Dönme houses of worship, prayers, books, and superstitions. But in a somewhat contradictory manner, he still insisted that the leaders of three Dönme groups should come together and declare that from that moment, the Dönmes as a separate people, like the Babylonians or Phoenicians, would fade into history. If they failed to do so, they would be responsible for the wrath of the Turks upon thousands of people.⁶¹

On November 29, Rüştü responded to one of the *Son Saat* readers, who accused the Dönmes of doing business only among themselves and exclusively employing other Dönmes in their work places. Rüştü stated that there were no more than fifty major Dönme companies, such as those of Mehmet Balcı, Şamlı Mustafa, and Macid Karakaş. They employed only those who had experience in trade. On December 2, another reader, who called himself H., asked Rüştü "1-why do Dönme girls not marry Turks; 2-why are Turks not present at their wedding ceremonies; 3-why are their dead not cleansed by Turkish imams and are buried in separate cemeteries?" H. also said that Rüştü did not mention other major Dönme companies such as those of Hüsnü Şinasi, Dilberzade, Edhem Dervish, Arslan Recep, Ertuğrul, Ali Cenap, Galeri Du Pera, Attar Faik, İsmet Kapancı, Kepler Ali, and İsmail Falih; he asked how "many of them would hire Turks?" He said that Turkish soldiers, coming home from war, had waited at Dönme companies for months, but the doors nevertheless remained shut to them. Instead, these companies hired their own brethren who came to Turkey during the population exchange.⁶² In his response, Rüştü stated that it was not proper to continue the discussion as long as the author failed to disclose his identity. Frustrated, he also addressed H. and others, saying "it is enough to attack those who wanted to be a Turk and remain a Turk."⁶³

On December 7, 1925, another author, D. Mehmet Emin, attacked Rüştü and said that he did not answer any of his questions satisfactorily. The important questions were not about him personally but about the Dönmes as a whole. Rüştü and few other people might have sincerely converted to Islam, but such a claim could not be applied to all the Dönmes. In making his point that the Dönmes supported one other exclusively, he claimed that during the population exchange, most of the cabins on the immigration ships were allocated by a Dönme organization to the Dönmes, and the Turks were left outside, wet and cold. The Turks, he argued, wanted to eliminate this duplicity, but the evidence suggested that the Dönmes did not. Therefore, they had two

⁶¹ *Son Saat*, November 26, 1925.

⁶² *Son Saat*, December 2, 1925.

⁶³ *Son Saat*, December 4, 1925.

options: “Either choose to be a Turk or publicly [declare yourself] a Dönme!” We don’t know how Rüştü answered these questions, since he disappeared from the historical record at this point. Instead, someone else, a certain “A.K.,” answered the question on behalf of Rüştü on December 12. The author was upset that the Dönme issue was being brought up again and again by “brainless” people, as if there was nothing else more important to discuss. Rather than answering the earlier questions, A. K. fervently denied all the allegations, calling them lies and slander, and claiming that none of them could be proven with evidence. Addressing the opponents, A. K. exclaimed: “this country belongs to all of us. The people whom you despise as Dönmes are more patriotic than you are.”⁶⁴ For whatever reason, this reaction would be the final word in the KarakAŞ Rüştü affair.⁶⁵

There did not seem to be any other public discussion of the Dönmes until 1927, when *Son Saat* featured an eighty-four-part series on the life of Sabbatai Sevi and his successors that ran every day from May 25 to August 20 of that year. Summarizing the earlier discussions about the Dönmes, Arif Oruç, a possible Dönme himself, writing under the pen name of Ayhan, wrote what would be the first (serialized) Turkish novel on Sabbatai Sevi, with the first ten parts devoted to Dönme history based on the oral and written sources of his time. Although the work suffers from some of the methodological issues discussed in the introduction, this is one of the most detailed and least biased Republican account of the Dönmes.

In the meantime, a very heated debate had been occurring in Salonica about the Dönmes who remained in the city after the population exchange. Almost a hundred of them had been able stay there by acquiring Albanian, Serbian, or some other European citizenship. The Greek newspapers accused them of being cheaters, illegal residents, and usurpers.⁶⁶ Eventually, most were forced to leave the city either for Turkey or Europe. The oppression eventually turned out to be a blessing when they learned that all the remaining Jews in the city had been deported to concentration camps and exterminated by the Nazis in the early 1940s.⁶⁷ For some of the Dönmes, this was yet another sign of their messiah’s saving power in rescuing them from ultimate destruction.

⁶⁴ *Son Saat*, December 12, 1925.

⁶⁵ On December 14, *Son Saat* published another interesting letter about a Dönme secret organization, but it was not directly connected to the Rüştü affair.

⁶⁶ For the Dönme hardships in post-population exchange Salonica, see Baer, *The Dönme*, 213–241.

⁶⁷ For an interesting story of a European Dönme politician and businessmen, Mümtaz Fazlı Taylan, see Marc Baer, “Turk and Jew in Berlin: The First Turkish Migration to Germany and the Shoah,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 55.2 (2013): 330–355. Taylan earned a Ph.D. at Berlin University in the 1920s, and was co-founder of the first Turkish Communist Party. He then withdrew from politics returned to Germany, and became a wealthy businessman there. Upon the accusation of being a Jew in the Nazi Germany, the Turkish consul in Berlin intervened into the issue and testified that Taylan was Turkish and Muslim, and hence saved him from being sent to a concentration camp. In the meantime however, Turkish Jews living in Germany did not get the same help from the Turkish officials, and hence most of them were perished in the concentration camps.

Silencing the Dönmes: Beginning of an End?

Between 1924 and 1926, an important chapter of Dönme history was about to close. While the internal Dönme opposition like that of Karakaş Rüştü was silenced by the Dönmes themselves, the external Dönme opposition to the emerging political system was silenced by the regime. Those years were extremely critical and chaotic times for the sustenance of the young Turkish Republic. Through the *Takrir-i Sukun Kanunu* (Law on the Maintenance of Order), Turkey was practically under martial law, and radical, top-down reforms were being implemented by the revolutionary elite in order to transform their “traditional” society in one generation into a completely Western, secular, nation-state at the expense of any opposition. The sultanate had been abolished in 1922 and the caliphate soon thereafter (1924); the Ottoman legal system was changed and placed on radically new foundations; Sufi lodges were closed; the principal opposition party, the Progressive Republican Party (*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası*), was banned; the Kurdish/Islamic Sheikh Said Revolt was crushed; and the idiosyncratic Independence Tribunals (*İstiklal Mahkemeleri*), first established to try traitors during the War of Independence, were revived as a way of eradicating enemies of the state, both real and imagined.

In these extraordinary times, some of the Dönmes had mixed feelings about the revolutions and Mustafa Kemal’s authoritarianism. Ahmet Emin [Yalman], a member of the opposition party, was temporarily forced to discontinue his newspaper, *Vatan*, and he subsequently disappeared from political life for a while. Fazlı Necib and Arif Oruç were banned from journalism. Another Yakubi Dönme, Dr. Şefik Hüsnü (1887–1959), who was the founder of the Socialist Party (1919) and then the general secretary of the Turkish Communist Party (1925), was interrogated and imprisoned in 1927 due to his anti-regime activities. Dr. Nazım and Mehmet Cavid Bey had both long harbored concerns about Kemal’s direction and methods. In a letter to Cavid in 1921, Dr. Nazım wrote that “Hemşerimiz Sarı” (“our blonde fellow countryman” [i.e., Mustafa Kemal]) “should withdraw from politics or collaborate with civilian CUP members. If he does not choose one of these options, his star will soon wane. The CUP members need to unite immediately. If we stay fragmented, we will leave the country in the hands of the army-educated people, and that would be, God forbid, a disaster. If a nation does not get rid of the military influence and *madrasa* spirit, it will never achieve progress and emancipation.”⁶⁸ Dr. Nazım also had his doubts about the CUP but still saw the largely discredited party as the only way to liberate the country. According to the testimony of Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, Dr. Nazım met the poet and communist

⁶⁸ Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *İttihatçı Liderlerin Gizli Mektupları* (Istanbul: Temel, 2002), 105–140. Writing with pen names such as Rüstem, Hoca Yakup Efendi, or Tütüncü Yakup Agha, it seems that Dr. Nazım was of the opinion that Mustafa Kemal was not a good fit for the political leadership and it was necessary rekindle the CUP.

Nazım Hikmet in Moscow, where Hikmet was reported to have said: “Who cares about the constitutional revolution? There is only one revolution, and that is the Proletariat Revolution.” Dr. Nazım replied to him, “Make the revolution you know best. In my time, the expected revolution was the Constitutional Revolution. We carried it out, but then we messed it up.”⁶⁹

As Mustafa Kemal gained more power, Dr. Nazım and Mehmet Cavid continued their activities with a very low profile. After the failed assassination attempt against Mustafa Kemal in Izmir on June 15, 1926, several people were arrested on charges of treason. Within two months, the Independence Tribunals were using the assassination attempt as an excuse for arresting hundreds of opposition figures on charges of conspiring against Mustafa Kemal and attempting to bring the CUP to power. After speedy trials, nineteen people were sentenced to death including Dr. Nazım and Mehmet Cavid. These executions were a critical turning point in the history of the young Turkish Republic, since the opposition—including the Dönme opposition—to Mustafa Kemal and to the regime were radically eradicated or pushed deep underground. According to Zurcher, the trials of 1926 undoubtedly had the character of a political purge, that the purge of the opposition was planned but the executions were partly improvised.⁷⁰

Some of the opponents of the regime reemerged in the revived Communist Party in the 1930s and later in the Democrat Party at the end of the 1940s. For the rest, the safest course was to comply with the needs of the new regime. The Dönmes were no exception. Some politically involved Dönmes found ways to work with the new regime: Faik Nüzhet [Terem] (who served as the first minister of finance), Tevfik Rüştü [Aras] (who served as the first minister of foreign affairs from 1923 through 1939), and Hüseyin Cahit [Yalçın] (who, as the best friend of Mehmet Cavid would adopt his infant son, Şiar Yalçın, upon Cavid’s execution; as a journalist and diplomat, he also served as one of the members of the Palestine Committee that recognized the State of Israel in 1949). In a report dated December 12, 1942, an English ambassador in Ankara informed the Foreign Office in London that “although in 1926 two of their leading personalities Dr. Nazim and Javid Bey, were executed on specific instructions of Mustafa Kemal, other Dönmes continued to play an important part in the Kemalist movement.”⁷¹

After 1926, both external political developments and internal communal debates forced the Dönmes to radically reposition themselves in the new political environment. Soon the majority of the Dönmes—regardless of their affiliation with the orthodox, reformist or assimilationist streams—made their way into the elite of the new Republic. Except for the dwindling orthodox community in each subsect, the majority chose to forget their ethnic and

⁶⁹ Şevket Aydemir, *Suyu Arayan Adam* (Istanbul: Remzi, 1979), 273–274.

⁷⁰ Erik Zurcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement (1905–1926)* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 143, 159.

⁷¹ Cited in Rifat Bali, *Wealth Tax Affair* (Istanbul: Libra, 2012), 408.

religious backgrounds and memories. The secular Turkish Republic turned to be a safe haven for the orthodox and assimilated new Dönme identities. Soon afterwards, most of the Dönmes became staunch supporters of the secular Turkish Republic because a secular Turkey could free them from two levels of oppression: The oppression of religious Dönme leadership and the oppression of traditional Muslim society, which looked at them with suspicion. In the meantime, the Dönme self-narrative vis-à-vis the new Republic began to be written and re-written from teleological vantage points until the present time. It is not surprising that Ben-Zwi found a flourishing Dönme community in the 1940s when he visited Turkey several times. He observed that among them were many in high and privileged positions in the social and economic life of the country. Leading Dönmes were deputies in the Turkish Parliament, university professors, writers, poets, lawyers, and distinguished surgeons; far more of the community members were traders, merchants, manufacturers, and bankers.⁷² But this dream of a “safe haven” was shattered during the World War II, in 1942, when, through the imposition of a special Wealth Tax, they were painfully reminded not to forget their “distinct” identity. Despite this disillusionment, however, the Dönme community continued to thrive with its own dynamics.

⁷² Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 115.

Conclusion

Passion for the Waiting

BORN INTO AN OTTOMAN Jewish family in 1626, some forty years later Sabbatai Sevi would be the catalyst for and center of one of the largest messianic movements in world history. Although the movement came to an end with Sabbatai's conversion under duress into Islam, its sectarian development in three subgroups—Yakubi, Karakaş, and Kapancı—has continued in different forms until the present day. Over centuries, the Dönmes created a parallel universe, a “messianic self-government” in which they formed their own beliefs, practices, and institutions, similar to many other crypto-communities in the Ottoman Empire. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the younger generation of Dönmes, who were by then better traveled and educated than their communal elders, many having attended more modern schools in major cities of the empire and Europe, began to change the internal structure of the Dönme tradition. In the meantime, Salonica, the religious heartland of the Dönme existence, was transformed into a prominent Dönme city, later remembered as the locus of the Dönme “golden age,” in part, thanks to the Dönmes’ international economic, cultural and political activities. As they entered the twentieth century, the members of the three subsects, whose total membership was then somewhere between 12,000 and 15,000, engaged in heated debates over how best to confront the new ideas and lifestyles brought by the flood of Westernism and modernity then washing over Ottoman shores. As a reaction to these developments, three “types” emerged within each of the three subgroups: the orthodox, the reformists, and the assimilationists. The traditionalists and reformists were greater in number in the earlier days, but over time the assimilationists became the largest and most dominant stream.

With other like-minded Young Turks, Masons, Jews, and Christians, the “liberated” Dönmes paved the way for a more modernized and secularized Turkey. Educated yet idiosyncratic Dönmes served as important soldiers, politicians, bankers, merchants, industrialists, educators, journalists, movie producers, and artists in the early days of the Republic. Assuming that a secular society would free them from the yoke of religion, community, and their status as suspect Muslims, most of them became staunch supporters of the

secular Turkish Republic. The assimilationists especially welcomed escape from the oppression of traditional Dönme leadership and the traditionalist Muslims who looked down on them with suspicion. As religion lost importance in Turkish public life, the Dönmes' assimilation increased even further, that, in turn, created a more favorable atmosphere for more intermarriages with Jews, Christians and Muslims.

In the meantime, in Greek Salonica, the physical memory of Dönme life was being erased from the city with few exceptions, such as the New Mosque (*Yeni Cami*) and the famous Kapancı mansions. The modern secular Turkish state remained the only place where the Dönme communal life could still survive. By the time the dust had settled after the Turkish War for Independence, the Dönmes and other “crypto-believers” and religious “minorities” in the country found themselves facing a paradox, since the Republic had lost its cosmopolitan and inclusive nature. While aiming to create a Western-style country with a secular-nationalist ideology, the Republic quickly adopted another European current: ethnic-nationalism, an ideology aimed at destroying the multiple and often overlapping identities and loyalties and creating a homogenous national culture. Religious (and ethnic) minorities were tolerated as long as they pledged their loyalty exclusively to the new nation. Not surprisingly, the ideology—along with its often heavy-handed imposition—alienated the country’s minorities, who had been accustomed to centuries of relative tolerance in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire. Intense Turkification policies in the early years were first proposed and then forced on all ethnic and religious groups, including Jews, Christians, Kurds, Alevis, and Dönmes, coercing them to think and outwardly act as secular and nationalist Turks. As a result, minorities either chose to comply with the demands of the new regime and assimilate or to leave the country. Of the three million members of religious minorities in Turkey in the 1920s, only about 200,000 remained in the 1950s and less than 100,000 in the 2000s. Those religious and ethnic minority members as well as Islamists and other dissenters who stayed in Turkey had to hide their true feelings or continue their activities underground. In the case of the Dönmes, their true identity had remained an open secret, and, as apparent during the implementation of the Wealth Tax in 1942—when the Dönmes were categorized separately, next to the Muslims, non-Muslims, and foreigners—it was apparently well known by the Turkish regime. This meant that even the path of full Dönme assimilation did not bring the desired tolerance and full acceptance into Turkish society.

In later decades, both in scholarship and popular culture, all kinds of claims and references about the Dönme were predicated on the assumption that there was only one group or type of Dönme. Modern observers of the Dönmes usually conflate the Dönme subgroups by creating false dichotomies and treat them as if they were members of an undifferentiated community. The Dönmes were never a monolithic community in history except for the very first decades of the movement. First, the three subgroups were different in their internal philosophies, development, and respective responses to

modern changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Second, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Dönme subgroups were increasingly differentiated along orthodox, reformist, and assimilationist tendencies. Third, in each subgroup, there has always been a difference between the elite/artistocratic Dönmes who had power, prestige, and “secret” knowledge and the common Dönmes who lacked them. And last, the increase in mixed marriages from the early years of the Republic further complicated the question of Dönme identity in the subsequent decades. Thus, in any analysis one needs to be clear which of these Dönmes is being referenced.

These complex layers of public and private loyalties and identities produced varieties of Dönme “types” by the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, one could see competing and conflicting Dönmes among the staunch secularists, Kemalists, nationalists, liberals, socialists, communists, and even conservatives.

In this complicated history, 1924–1926 were very critical years for the Dönmes, since all opposition—including the Dönme opposition—to the new regime was effectively repressed and marginalized. Important Dönme political opposition figures such as Mehmed Cavid, Ahmet Emin, Dr. Şefik Hüsnü and Fazlı Necib were silenced, imprisoned, or executed. Likewise, Dönme opposition from within such as that of Karakaş Rüştü was contained by internal Dönme mechanisms. During these fateful years, the Dönmes had to make historical decisions with regard to their future. The Yakubi and Kapancı sects, with some exceptions, chose the path of full assimilation. Most of them devoted considerable effort to erasing their own identities, including the conscious refusal to pass down their traditions to their offspring. It is believed, for example, that the Kapancı elders decided to discontinue transmitting their tradition and memories to the next generations. It is little wonder that the first two Republican Kapancı generations were very uninterested and uninformed about Dönme tradition in comparison to the contemporary self-taught young generation in the Internet age. The lack of written guidebooks and the concentration of “secret knowledge” in the hands of a few elect Dönme elders were among the main reasons for the ignorance of later Dönmes. A considerable number of the Karakaş, on the other hand, managed to survive in those stormy years and continued to preserve their private ethno-religious identity.

After 1926, the Dönmes tried to stay away from politics as much as possible, with a significant exception in their interest in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For example, Tevfik Rüştü Aras served as the first minister of Foreign Affairs between 1923 and 1939 during which he recruited many people of Dönme origin to the office. The remaining Dönme political opposition to the regime went underground and eventually reemerged as part of the opposition movements and parties such as the Turkish Communist Party and the Democrat Party in later decades. Most of the Dönmes found ways to work with the new regime. Large families from all three subsects such as the Dilbers, İpekçis, Balcıs, Yalmans, Duhanis, and Bezmens reestablished their businesses and became prominent in Turkish trade, commerce, and industry.

Without question, their contributions to the development of modern Turkey have been immeasurable.

In public, all the Dönmes—regardless of their being orthodox, assimilationist, or other—were secular citizens of the Turkish Republic. Nevertheless, external pressures such as the new Republic’s Turkification policies, the Wealth Tax in 1942, the rise of anti-Semitism, and lately the rise of anti-Sabbateanism painfully reminded them of their “memories.” Speculating about the future of the Dönmes in the 1950s, Ben-Zwi posed a series of stark alternatives:

What of their future? While it is impossible to predict, one may nevertheless venture a guess that they will continue to survive as believers in the doctrine of Sabbatai Zvi. . . . No one can predict their future in the decisive movement of racial and political integration now in process in Turkey. If the lessons of Jewish history are any guide, one may be permitted to envisage a state of affairs in which the Dönmes, like many similar Jewish groups in the past, may have to choose between their complete and *total assimilation* [italics is mine] within their Turkish environment and their *full return* [italics is mine] to the national Jewish fold of their people.¹

More than half a century has passed since this observation, and part of his prophecy has already been realized. Most Dönmes have chosen “total assimilation” and only a few the “full return,” to Judaism² but several thousand people, primarily Karakaş, continue to survive as believers. Some members of the younger generation of the Dönme started to learn more about their history when radical Turkish nationalism lost its rigor in the 1980s and the heretofore repressed sub-identities and cultures within Turkish society started to reemerge. Paradoxically, as this learning increased—thanks to the recent explosion of “Dönme literature” in Turkey—the very same development, coupled with the rule of the conservative/Islamist governments in the last decade,³ has renewed the culture of secrecy and fear among the religious as well as their assimilated relatives. As a result, some have begun looking for new ways to protect their existence, including taking out a second citizenship in a different country.

Today in Turkey there are approximately 60,000–70,000 persons of Dönme descent and perhaps another 10,000 in other parts of the world, mostly in Europe and North America. It is hard to know how many of them are “pure” Dönme on both their maternal and paternal sides, since mixed marriages became a common phenomenon in the second half of the twentieth century, especially among the Yakubis and Kapancıs. Of those cultural Dönmes, only 3,000–4,000, mostly Karakaş, are thought to remain actual believers who hold on to their distinct ethno-religious identity, as reflected in their neatly

¹ Ben Zwi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, 128.

² Michael Freund, “The Emergence of Turkey’s Hidden Jews,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 23, 2011.

³ For the tension between the old elite and the new Islamic elite, see Ozlem Madi-Sisman, “Eski ve Yeni arasında İslami Burjuvazinin Geleceği,” *Aksam Daily News*, February 12, 2009.

prepared religious calendars, cookbooks, tombstones, and cemeteries. For the majority of the Dönme descendants, the Dönme past is limited to family history, memory, and nostalgia, devoid of its sacred connotations. Despite all the assimilation or opposition, a distinct “Salonian” identity remains part of their culture and family history. Internalizing a secular form of the *burden of silence*, most of them still prefer to live in a loosely connected web of relations, attend certain schools, frequent the same social circles and clubs, and live in distinct neighborhoods. As for the believers, a community of the invisible messiah may be barely discernible, but it is still there as a corporate body. For them, the passion for waiting and the second coming of the messiah is still the only way to break the *burden of the silence*, because they still chant: “Sabbatai Sevi Sabbatai Sevi/Esparamos a ti/Sabbatai Sevi Sabbatai Sevi/No es un otro como ti.”⁴

⁴ “Sabbatai Sevi Sabbatai Sevi/We are waiting for you/Sabbatai Sevi Sabbatai Sevi/There is none like you.” The famous Dönme supplication for the Second Coming of the Messiah.

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Thessaloniki/Salonica: Macedonian National Archive

Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard-Houghton Library

London, England, Oxford: Bodleian Library

Turkish Daily and Weeklies: Akşam, İkdam, İleri, Resimli Dünya, Resimli Gazete, Son Saat, Tanin, Türk Sesi, Vakit, Vatan, Yedigün, and Yenigün.

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